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Dance as a Multimodal Semiotic System: A Linguistic Perspective on Bodily Expression

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ABSTRACT

This research studies dance as a multimodal semiotic system through the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes. Using Saussure's theory of semiosis, dance is viewed as a system of signs shaped by cultural context. In this system, physical movements, gestures, and facial expressions act as "signifiers" that communicate meaning within the codes of different dance styles. When choreographers select and arrange movements, the meaning of each gesture becomes clear in the context of the whole performance. Barthes' idea of "culturalization" explains how dance reflects the spontaneity of bodily expression while also transforming into repeatable and structured systems. This study also draws on Edmund Husserl's view that dance exists in a "pre-reflexive" realm of symbolic expression, where body movements convey meaning through cultural codes in choreography and performance. By applying linguistic and semiotic theories, the paper presents dance as a language that produces meaning through interconnected systems of signs in cultural settings. Dance is also seen as a universal language that crosses cultural boundaries and can be understood by different societies. To explore this, a global questionnaire was conducted with dancers from around the world. The results show that dance functions as an international language of self-expression and intercultural connection. It allows people to communicate through a shared non-verbal medium. The study concludes that dance can be seen as a symbolic language for humanity, forming a unique multimodal communication system across continents and cultures.

Keyword: Multimodal Semiotic System; Dance As Language; Bodily Expression; Cultural Codes; Global Dance Expression

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 16 May 2025 | Revised: 12 June 2025 | Accepted: 25 July 2025 | Published Online: 29 August 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i9.10046>

CITATION

Pan, W., 2025. Dance as a Multimodal Semiotic System: A Linguistic Perspective on Bodily Expression. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(9): 86–106. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i9.10046>

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1. Introduction

As a form of art and a way of human expression, dance has moved out of the sphere of entertainment or cultural practice ^[1]. Throughout history and different cultures, dance has always been a crucial means of conveying emotions, societal norms, and in some cases, political ideologies. Dance remains a way of conveying individual identities, group-based experiences, and cultural stories in formal and informal settings ^[2]. However, while oral language and communicative function have been thoroughly investigated in terms of their role as a vehicle of language, the examination of dance as a system of communication, and in the linguistic and semiotic contexts has an underdeveloped status ^[3].

The science of semiotics, which examines the production and interpretation of signs and symbols, provides a strong structure for considering types of communication outside of standard language ^[4]. Dance can assume a complex multimodal nature if viewed from a semiotic perspective. In this system, body movements, gestures, facial expressions, and even body space are used as signs to convey meaning. These bodily signs are put together like words in a spoken language into syntactic formations that allow the ideas, feelings, and stories to be communicated. This approach places dance as an aesthetic/performative enterprise and an intelligent and symbolic language that can communicate ideas to those it addresses.

Despite the abundant semiotic potential in the dances, their study has always been relegated to the study of art, performance, and cultural studies. The linguistic approach that studies language as a system of signs provides a new, principled understanding of dance. Scholars such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Charles Peirce have contributed to understanding how signs and sign systems work. Still, their work has primarily centred on verbal language and visual texts. So far, there has been comparatively little use of linguistic theories to analyse dance, particularly when using the human body like a “signifier” of meaning ^[5].

This gap is sought to be filled by the application of linguistic and semiotic theories to study bodily expression in dance in this research. Particularly, we are investigating the dance as a multimodal semiotic system with move-

ment, gesture, posture, and facial expression regarded as individual signs in a larger system of meaning. Like spoken language, which consists of phonemes, syntax, and semantics, the dance is constituted of bodily signs – each has the potential meaning that adds to the overall “message” conveyed. In this study, we analyse the parts of physical expression in dance by using linguistic theory and comparing dance movements with elements of a language system.

The significance of this study encompasses not only broadening the scope of semiotic and linguistic analysis but also the ability to reveal new aspects of dance’s social and cultural factors. Along with a means for describing the world, dance is a language in its own right – a body-based, emotion-based, context-based language. In this manner, explorations of dance as a multimodal semiotic system can illuminate how human beings use bodies in their expressions and interpret meaning, especially in a world where nonverbal communication becomes an essential aspect of daily engagements.

1.1. Research Questions

- In what way can dance be considered a multimodal semiotic system in which bodily movements, gestures, and expressions could be signs?
- How might a linguistic approach to the study of bodily expression in dance help improve our understanding of this phenomenon from the perspective of the study of the structure, function, and interpretation of signs?
- What role do cultural and contextual factors play in interpreting bodily signs in dance, and what role do they play in meaning-making?

Dance is analysed through the prism of linguistic and semiotic theory to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of bodily expression in dance. Furthermore, this research will add to the general discussion of multimodal communication and explain how the different modes (physical movement, facial expressions, and gestures) come together to form one message.

Using this investigation, we want to prove that dance goes beyond its aesthetic and performative nature; it becomes a complex, organised system of communication that works like a language. By explicating the linguistic principles behind dance, we can recognise a greater under-

standing of its communicative powers and how complex messages can be conveyed. The role of dance is a vital part of humanity in modern times.

2. Literature Review

When looking at dance in terms of semiotics and linguistics, the area involves a multidisciplinary approach that relies upon semiotics, communication studies, linguistics, and arts disciplines. In this literature review, we discuss some core scholarly contributions that consider dance from the perspective of a multimodal system, the role of the body in the communication process, and the use of linguistic and semiotic paradigms to analyse dance.

2.1. Historical Trajectory of Dance

Dance is one of the most instinctive ways of communicating the message of their being, intertwined into the fabric of human culture and history. Dance, from the ancient rituals to the contemporary dance, was the tool of communication, a means of expressing emotions through the body, and a reflection of social values. This part follows the historical path of dance, taking it from its primitive tribal representations to its modern-day appearances as an art and cultural expression. The narrative will include the historical grounds, the way formalised techniques evolved, and the impact of social, cultural, and technological changes on the practices of dance.

2.1.1. Prehistoric and Early Dance Forms

The beginnings of the dance date back to the prehistoric era, with its usage as a means of communication, a ritual, and narration of the story. Dance was largely applied for religious purposes by early human societies during ceremonies and rites of passage. Dance in tribal cultures was a way of communicating with the divine, celebrating birth, death, and marriage, and carrying out rituals of fertility, hunting, and war. These were usually danced in circles, which represented unity and togetherness, with movements that were linked with nature, elements, and life's cycles^[6].

Cave paintings and carvings from ancient civilisations would indicate that people would often depict dance positions in their depictions of humans, showing how dance

was a part of the early cultures. Such depictions imply that dance was not only an artistic activity but a significant element of the social identity, which unified people with the community they lived in and their surroundings^[7].

2.1.2. Classical Dance Traditions

The ancient civilisations, including those of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, made very important contributions towards the development of dance into an art. The dance was a part of both religious ceremonies and royal courts in ancient Egypt. These dances were often expressive and symbolic, with the movements sometimes representing the life and death cycles and reincarnation. Pharaohs and nobles used dance to show their power; the dancers in temples danced before the gods as a bridge between earthly and otherworldly realms^[8].

Dance played an important role in Ancient Greece in social life as well as drama performances. Greek drama was usually complemented by dance, especially through the chorus, a group of performers that engaged in a rhythmic song accompanied by dance that depicted the story and provoked emotions in the audience. The Greeks held dance as a combination of rhythm, harmony, and movement that reflected harmony in the cosmos. The focus on the significance of proportion and beauty of the Greek dance had by far a tremendous impact on the shaping of the great Western dance traditions^[9].

Though less formalised, Roman dance retained strong cultural implications. Gladiatorial games, religious and secular festivals were great public spectacles that allowed for dance; they were a part of these spectacles. Nevertheless, over time, Roman dance acquired a more entertainingly flavoured taste, and the transformation of it from what was initially sacred into what it is today as performance and leisure has been brought about^[10].

2.1.3. Medieval and Renaissance Dance

In the medieval period in Europe, dance became more structured and social. The strict hierarchical societies were depicted with the courtly dances of the Middle Ages, which were often conducted by the nobility. These dances, including the Galliard and the Pavane, were conducted in highly formalised, highly stylised ways that showed off

posture, grace, and good conduct. The settings were typically closed areas like the courts in which they were an entertainment and appeasement to the master's ego ^[11].

The Renaissance was the turning point in dance history as it became a formal art, and ballet was born. Italy became the centre for dance development in the given period: the Ballet de Cour (court ballet) became an essential cultural move. The dances were very stylised, involving complex footwork, gestures, and poses, yet all coming with the tinge of humanism and interest in depicting the human form ^[12]. During this period, ballet notation was introduced, a systemisation of dance movements and positions that enabled the passing down and preservation of choreography ^[13].

2.1.4. Baroque and Classical Periods (17th–19th Century)

With the baroque period in the 17th century, dance developed as a great art, highly refined and codified, and Louis XIV of France was an important figure in the evolution of dance. Under the guise of the Sun King, Louis XIV was not only a lover of art but also a great dancer. During his rule, the Académie Royale de Danse was established in 1661, the first formal dance system in France. Ballet became an integral part of court life, and it was purposefully applied as a way to glorify the monarchy and to show the power and prestige of the ruler.

Contributions to ballet made by the French court were the key to the future professionalisation of ballet. The development of the French school of ballet in the 18th century resulted in the creation of formal techniques and the training of professional dancers. In the initial stage of its performance, ballet was performed in theatres and not in the courts, thus shifting the performance from the privacy of the court to the public space. The steps, such as Pas de deux, grand jeté, and others, became the staples of the ballet lexicon, and the dancers' training concentrated on grace, precision, and discipline.

The transition to a highly technical and expressive art of ballet took place during the Classical period in the 19th century. Advancements in choreography and costume designs resulted in the birth of such classical ballets as *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. In those

days, prima ballerinas, including Marie Taglioni and Anna Pavlova, revolutionised ballet by focusing on the delicacy and technicality of the female dancer ^[14].

2.1.5. Modern Dance Movement (1880–1910)

The rebellion against the rigidity of classical ballet was seen in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Such early dancers as Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and Ruth St. Denis tried to develop a freer and more expressive dance. The modern dance movement resisted the strictures of classical ballet, preferring natural movement, personal expression, and relationship to the feelings and lives of the dancer ^[15].

Isadora Duncan's natural and fluid movement drew inspiration from everything from ancient Greek art and philosophy to the concert dance productions that emerged in Europe. Martha Graham's contraction and release technique helped bring about a new language in expressive movement that expressed deep, emotional states. It was the period of birth of a modern dance, which is an individualistic and highly expressive art, while classical ballet was a tradition that was set ^[16].

2.1.6. Contemporary Dance (Mid-20th Century–Present)

In the mid-20th century, contemporary dance emerged as an amalgam of various dancing styles, such as ballet, modern dance, jazz, and even African and Latin American dance. The postmodern dance movement, which was initiated by such choreographers as Merce Cunningham and Alvin Ailey, emphasised the exploration of movements, the refusal of narrative, and the deconstruction of traditional dance borders. This was the time when hip-hop emerged, which introduced street dance into the mass culture and changed the paradigm of dance presentation and consumption ^[17].

Contemporary dance today is still changing, absorbing new tendencies of pop culture, social movements, and technology. The increased involvement in dance competitions through social media and viral dances has democratised the dance form and enabled diverse forms to prevail and combine.

2.1.7. Technological Influence on Dance

Incorporation of technology in dance performances has set a new frontier in the 21st century. Video projections, digital media, or even virtual reality, have become tools of the choreographers and dancers to find new ways of responding to the audiences. Platforms of social media such as Instagram and TikTok have also made room to allow viral dance movements to spread quickly, playing a role in shaping popular and international dance patterns. Dance is no longer bound to the traditional stages but is accessible in the virtual scenes and the interactive forms^[18].

The dance history is a story of its rich, dynamic development from the prehistoric rituals to its current various and globally connected forms. The dance has not only been an art expression in terms of creativity but also a social, cultural, and political force. As it develops, dance is a deep language of the body, but one that continues to narrate feelings, stories, and identities from one generation to the next. The history of dance represents major societal trends like the evolution of ritual into performance, the codification of technique, and the hybridisation of different cultural impacts. Nowadays, dance is situated at the crossroads of tradition and innovation: on the one hand, dance is an object of history, on the other, it is dynamic and constantly changing with the face of social, tech, and artistic changes.

2.2. Dance as a Semiotic System

The concept of dance as a system of signs could be traced to the fundamental writings in semiotics. In terms of the semiotic theory, anything that represents meaning via the “signifier” (physical form of the sign) and “signified” (concept or meaning assigned to the sign) is termed a “sign”^[19]. The semiotic theory was expanded by Roland Barthes in 1977 to cover the cultural phenomena such as performance and the arts, focusing on how gestures, movements, and expressions can be taken to mean signs that express ideas, emotions, and cultural narratives. Although Barthes was initially interested in written and spoken texts, his framework has been transferred to dance to show how movements, like words, are the signs and bear meaning^[20].

In the frame of dance, it has been postulated by scholars such as Judith Butler (1990) that even the body itself is a performative site on which bodily gesticulation and mo-

tion signify beyond mere physical affectation; it indicates identities, social roles, and political messages. Butler’s contribution to gender theory, especially her idea of the performative acts, has affected the research of dance as a method of expression and construction of identity. Her theory envisages that through dance (as a way of embodiment), it conveys individual and collective identities, as a powerful sense maker in a cultural and societal perspective^[21].

2.3. Dance as a Multimodal Communication System

As opposed to spoken language, dance is ‘multimodal’ in nature, comprising different elements such as movement, gesture, posture, facial expressions, and so forth, to produce meaning. This attitude is consistent with the work of scholars in multimodal communication who maintain that meaning is not made by one form of communication (for example, speech/ gesture) but rather from a combination of several modes of communication. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) coined “multimodal discourse,” implying that communication results from bringing different semiotic modes that cooperate to create meaning. In a dance context, every mode, including gestures, facial expression, or a movement pattern, can have its respective meaning, but only when all of them are interpreted together can it have its proper meaning^[22].

Scholars such as Susan Foster (1996) introduced the concept of multimodal communication through dance, discussing the communication via body in motion as an individual sign and in context to its environment, i.e., other dancers and performance space. Foster’s work indicates the role of context in defining the meaning of dance because movements can acquire various connotations depending on their sociocultural and historical contexts. This consideration is especially relevant in linguistic analysis of dance, since culture and context influence what may be termed the “language” of dance^[23].

2.4. Linguistic Theories Applied to Dance

The involvement of linguistic theories in dance is a development that has been taking place over the past few years; scholars are just beginning to understand how dance could be treated as a language system. Linguistics,

which has been a field that focuses on spoken and written language, provides a useful framework to describe how meaning is created through signs, structures, and codes. There are scholars such as John F. Searle (1969) and Noam Chomsky (1957), who have developed theories on the structure of language, concentrating on syntax, semantics, and pragmatics; concepts that can be applied to analysing the “grammar” of dance. Although Chomsky’s study of a generative grammar was first utilised to consider verbal language, his theories have also been used to construct the idea of the “syntax” in dance – the rules of organisation for movements to convey meaning ^[24,25].

The analysis of dance from the linguistic point of view is greatly predetermined by the work of Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (2001), whose article was concerned with formulating the concept of “dance as a language”. They claim that just as verbal language, there is also a system of signs, which is organised in a certain way based on conventions, rules, and patterns. They specify that the dance has its unique “lexicon” consisting of movements, which can be differently combined to convey complex notions and feelings. Their work has something to offer as a basis for the understanding of how movements work as “words” in a larger “sentence” system, where the significance of each movement derives from its relation to other movements in a specific context ^[26].

Sources of further work have developed this idea by including theories from cognitive linguistics that research how kinesthetic movements could be introduced in terms of conceptual metaphors. For instance, in a dance, the leap or jump could represent an upward movement towards an ideal or goal, and the fall or collapse could mean a failure or defeat. These metaphors are not only culturally specific. They are based on how humans perceive and conceptualise their bodies regarding space, time, and emotions ^[27].

2.5. Cultural and Social Dimensions of Dance as Communication

Although the tools for analysing the dance as a communicative system are provided by semiotic and linguistic theories, it is necessary to take the cultural and social aspects into account – the elements that define the meaning of the dance movements. Dance does not incorporate discrete physiological signs; it is rooted in cultural practices

and social rituals. Victor Turner (1969) described ritual and performance, including dance, as a means of delivering social messages; conveying collective values, norms, and beliefs. His idea of “communitas” illustrates how dance is one of the main social activities through which it can convey meanings beyond individual expression ^[28].

The role of dance in expressing national, ethnic, and gender identities, among others, has been studied by scholars of cultural studies, such as Gül 2014. Dances like flamenco, ballet, and hip-hop might possess culturally significant meaning, which may gain different interpretations in history and society. For example, in some cultures, dance movements can symbolise power and control, while in others, they can symbolise inability and resistance. These subtleties are necessary when one is taking a linguistic approach while discussing dance because “syntax” and the “grammar” of movements might differ considerably among cultures ^[29].

2.6. Gap in the Literature

Despite the helpful contribution of these scholars, there is a void in the literature on an all-around linguistic interpretation of dance as a multi-mode semiotic system. Much of the previous research has concentrated on the specific aspects of dance (gesture and movement) or single cultural contexts of dance. Very few studies have systematically subjected linguistic theories to semiotic analysis to construct a systematic framework through which dance could be understood as a complete communication system.

This research seeks to fill this gap by examining bodily expression within dance using linguistic and semiotic theories and providing a fresh approach to how dance can be viewed as a language in its own right.

3. Methodology

The concept of this research is the multimodal semiotic system of dance, combining both linguistic and semiotic theories, namely the theories by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes. and Edmund Husserl. The main objective is to investigate how bodily motions, gestures, facial expressions, and spatial mechanisms in dance coincide to infer meaning in constructed systems. The qualitative methodology below incorporates an array of methods of

data collection and analysis, which tend to examine dance from external and internal viewpoints. Using observational techniques, video analysis, and interviews, this research provides multi-dimensional ideas for understanding how dance is a language system, just like a spoken or written language.

3.1. Research Design

This study uses the qualitative case study design to investigate dance as a multimodal semiotic system^[30]. The case study approach provides an in-depth analysis of the semiotic aspects of dance in specific situations. Various cultural, stylistic, and expressive dancing traditions were represented by three distinct forms of dances that were selected: ballet, contemporary dance, and hip-hop. Each form was chosen based on its distinct cultural connotations, choreographed language of movement, and capacity for expression.

The case study design explores the depth of the relationship between signifiers (bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions) and signifieds (meanings and concepts expressed through these signs).

3.2. The Contemporary Role of Saussure, Barthes, and Husserl for the Dance as a Semiotic System

Using the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Edmund Husserl can enrich the study of dance from a semiotic perspective. These scholars offer a framework for studying dance movements and gestures beyond the scope of art, as systems of signs immersed in cultural and social contexts. Their theories shed light on how the meanings of culture, emotion, and society are conveyed through bodily communication, beyond the physical expression, through dance.

3.2.1. Saussure's Theory of Semiosis and the Dance

The concept of semiosis theorised by Ferdinand de Saussure is critical in understanding dance as a system of signs. Saussure believed that language is a means of communication, and other means of communication refer to

a system of signifiers (the physical form of the sign) and signifieds, which is what is conveyed as a concept (the conceptual meaning of the sign). Movements of dances and gestures are like words in a language, such that they are signifiers of cultural, emotional, and social meanings. Such movements, when fitted into a particular choreography, form an arrangement that functions within a cultural context. Equally, the dance movement denotes certain concepts or ideas coded into a choreography.

For instance, in the ballet, a pirouette or an arabesque is not merely a chain of physical actions, but a signifier that bears a culturally meaningful meaning—grace, elegance, or technical skill. Such movements become part of the cultural dictionary of ballet: the signified is placed in the framework of classical ideals of beauty and discipline^[31]. Similarly, such movements as popping or locking in hip-hop dance represent personal empowerment, defiance, and self-expression. Each type of dance, therefore, designs its unique cultural system of signs where movements are communicated and established in synchronism, contextually, and in sequence^[32].

3.2.2. Barthes and the Culturalization of Dance Movements

Starting from the idea of Saussure, Roland Barthes proposes the concept of culturalization, which studies the process of inscribing meaning in bodily expressions through the use of cultural codes. Barthes argues that signs in a culture are not just random symbols, but also have meanings. They acquire culturally learned meanings that change with time. In dance, the culturalization can be best described through ways in which cultural practices, norms, and historical realities influence movements and gestures. Barthes' theory allows us to see how dance movements combine the spontaneity of bodily expression and the inscribed codes of culture.

In the case of contemporary dance, for example, the random and often impromptu movements could reveal personal or emotional conditions that escape proper cultural prescriptions. Still, despite this seeming freedom of movement, movements will have imprints of cultural codes, such as the open body postures in contemporary dance, to convey such themes as freedom or resistance. The gestures, body language, and spatial dynamics in contempo-

rary dance and ballet are spontaneous expressions as well as culturally marked signs, evidencing Barthes's thinking on the association of dance while keeping the individual and the collective whole ^[33].

3.2.3. Husserl's Pre-Reflexive Nature of Dance

The use of the pre-reflexive nature of dance concept by Edmund Husserl provides a crucial angle to the study of the embodiment of dance. According to Husserl, it is not just a conscious expression of self but is based on pre-reflective bodily experience and unconscious reflection. This means that much communication and movement happen at a non-cognitive level in dance. The body works instinctively and fluidly, allowing the dancer to express meanings that are not always consciously held but are part of the corporeality of the dancing.

This pre-reflexive experience is very distinctive in ballet, which involves some very technical, precise dance movements, yet many of which may have cultural or emotional weight that is not necessarily conscious or verbal. The formal experience for the actor and audience of dance is in the body and presents meaning that is sensed but not necessarily considered in abstract and verbal terms. The meanings are represented by the dancer, making the dance an imaginative experience for the dancer and the watcher ^[34].

Dance viewed through the glasses of Saussure, Barthes, and Husserl can be seen as more than a piece of art. It is a semiotic system where the bodily movements, gestures, and spatial movement are used as signs within the grand context of a culture ^[35]. Saussure's theory of semiosis enables us to see the role of dance as a system of cultural signs, the idea of culturalization proposed by Barthes brings to light the relations between spontaneous embodied expression and culturally encoded codes as mutual entanglements, and the concept of pre-reflexivity of dance by Husserl marks the embodied, non- collectively, these theories present an all-round understanding of dance as a form of communication that has many layers of complexity and one that is more than mere communication; it transcends the conscious mind and reflects the interaction of the body, culture and society ^[36].

3.3. Data Collection

The data were collected using direct observation, video analysis, and interviews with dancers and choreographers. These methods were selected because they could collect the objective external perceptions of dance and the subjective internal perceptions of the individuals actively involved in creating and performing dance ^[31].

3.3.1. Observation of Dance Performances

The main approach to data collection entailed first-hand observations ^[32] in live dance performances. Performances were chosen from professional, academic, or community settings, which covered all sorts of dance practices. Ballet performance was viewed in strict theatre environments, contemporary movements were systematically evaluated in rehearsal and performance rooms, and hip-hop was examined via the street-level events and contests. These situations were selected to reflect a full expressive range of dance, from the highly structured classical dance forms to improvisational street styles.

In the course of the observation, certain elements attracted more preference, and they include:

Bodily Movements: Different kinds of motion were noted, including jumps, spins, lifts, and gestures. Each movement was accordingly grouped according to its function in the choreography, which was either expressive, symbolic, or narrative.

Gestures and Postures: The researchers were attentive to how dancers use their bodies to express emotion or meaning. The study emphasised some isolated gestures (e.g., hand movements or facial expressions) and more complex sequences of gestures that create a narrative or emotional subtext.

Facial Expressions: The research examined how facial expressions played out with body movements. For example, a dance move, whether smiling, glowering, or looking at another person, could change the meaning in a way that would affect the emotional meaning.

Spatial Relationships: Space was an essential element in the analysis. The dancers' proximity, positions on stage, and performance styles in the performance space were researched to identify how spatial dynamics contribute to meaning-making.

Observation notes derived from these notes were descriptive and structured around recurrent themes and the role played by bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions in meaning creation. The findings were then compared between the three dance styles to ascertain the consistency or variation in using and interpreting signs.

3.3.2. Video Analysis

To complement the observational information, the video recordings of the dance performances were analysed. Such video recordings allowed for a more detailed analysis of individual movements, gestures, and spatial relationships between the dancers. Choreography and performance were filmed from many angles to demonstrate the overall view.

Specialised software dissects each dance piece and makes a frame-by-frame analysis. This analysis aims to measure how movements were performed in terms of speed, time, accuracy, and the level of synchronisation among dancers. The video also revealed the identification of essential sequences of movements that had symbolic or narrative meaning in the choreography.

The video recordings were invaluable for observing the micro-gestures and facial expressions that are too difficult to observe in a live situation. In dance, small, seemingly unimportant movements (change of posture) can bear considerable emotional or symbolic significance, which became more recognisable after several recorded reviews.

3.3.3. Interviews with Dancers and Choreographers

The third approach to data collection was semi-structured interviews with dancers and choreographers. This approach was adopted to understand how people engaged in dance conceive and implement bodily gestures as a communication medium. There was an interview of 15 dancers and choreographers of the three selected dance forms: professional, semi-professional, and amateur.

Through the interviews, which were carried out with 15 dancers with different backgrounds (**Appendix A**), the similarity that arose amongst all of them was the concept of dance as a unifying force. One contemporary dancer puts it as thus, ‘When I am dancing, I do not require words

to communicate with the audience; everything is in the movement. Similarly, a ballet dancer has remarked, ‘In ballet, movement is never an aesthetic accident; it is a language of conveying discipline and grace, and everybody understands it, regardless of where one is a native of.’ A hip-hop dancer supported this idea and stated the following: Hip-hop is not about the step; it is about expressing myself and finding people with whom I can connect on a deeper level. These reactions point to the fact that dance can overcome any cultural and linguistic barriers, which is theoretically aligned with semiotics and multimodal communication approaches.

The interviews were meant to explore the dancers’ sentiments about corporeal expression in dance and their understanding of bodily expression as a component of the semiotic system. Key interview questions included (**Appendix B**):

- What do you understand about the movements in dance as a means of communication?
- Do you consider your movements to be an element of the language system? If, how do you organise your movements to mean something?
- How important are the facial expressions and gestures in your performances?
- How do you decode the steps of other dancers, and what does it mean to read a dance?

From these interviews, insights on the conscious and subconscious use of bodily expression by dancers and choreographers were gained, which helped to provide broader contexts to the observation/video analysis’s findings and a hitherto unseen perspective. The interview material was also coded for the themes of bodily expression, gesture, and intentionality of specific movements.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed at three levels: Transcription and coding, semiotic analysis, and linguistic analysis.

3.4.1. Transcription and Coding

The first data analysis step was transcription and coding. The transcripts of interviews were coded concerning

recurring themes regarding the function of gestures, faces, and movement. The observational data was also classified into various kinds of movement and gestures, identifying it as expressive, symbolic, or narrative. Transcriptions of

the video recordings resulted in frame-by-frame sequences that allowed the identification of those moments when movements themselves changed the meaning or emotional tone (**Figure 1**).

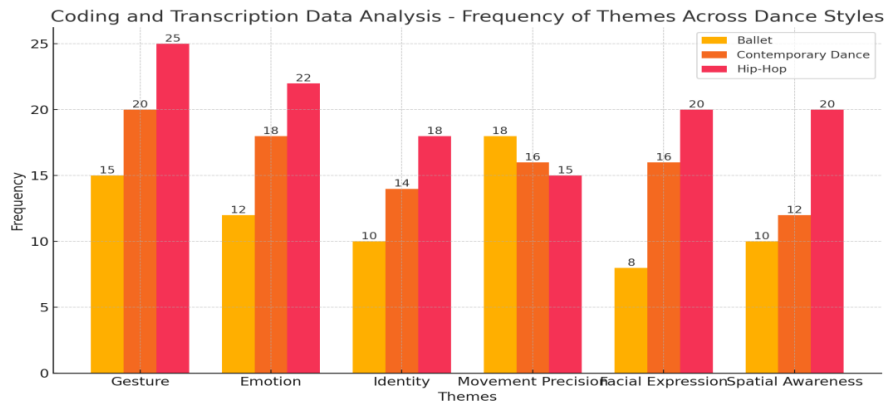


Figure 1. Thematic coding analysis between dance styles.

Note: This is a bar graph showing the number of recurring themes/topicalities—like “Gesture,” “Emotion,” “Identity,” “Movement Precision,” “Facial Expression,” and “Spatial Awareness”—as distributed in the three forms of dance: ballet, Contemporary Dance, and Hip-Hop. This figure represents the importance of the interview, observations, and video data.

3.4.2. Semiotic Analysis

The data from the semiotic perspective was studied following the works of Saussure and Barthes. Every movement, gesture, and facial expression was broken down into a “signifier” and the meaning or concept it represented was analysed as a “signified”. For instance, pirouette in ballet may mean sophistication and defiance, while a hip-hop jump can illustrate strength and persistence. These signs were analysed in terms of their place in the larger context of the piece of dance to find out how they converged to create a system of signifying.

Similarly, Barthes’s concept of culturalization also explored how dance movements combine spontaneous body expression with culturally encoded signs. This process revealed how dancers’ bodies communicate meaning viscerally and through learned cultural expression systems.

3.4.3. Linguistic Analysis

Finally, the study undertook a linguistic analysis of the dance movements. Based on the concepts of syntax and Searle’s pragmatics offered by Chomsky, the research investigated how dance as a language system operates within its own rules. The internal syntax of each dance was also analysed, whereby the rules of how the movements are ar-

ranged and put together to make sense were examined. For instance, in ballet, the sequence of movement could be rigidly ordered (plié → relevé → pirouette → arabesque), but contemporary dance can allow more freedom in the structures of the movements. The analysis also examined the Semantics of the movements, establishing the meanings that the movements conveyed depending on their presence within the piece.

This linguistic approach also took into account the Linguistic consideration of the role of cultural codes and pre-reflexive bodily expression as realised by Husserl. For Husserl’s philosophy, dance does not simply express the conscious form of communication. Still, it is a form of embodied knowledge and symbolic expression, embodied in the body’s movement beyond thoughts of reflection.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical standards for research with human subjects. Informed consent was only received from dancers and choreographers so they would fully understand the research aims and be free to withdraw whenever desired. During the research, confidentiality was ensured, and data were anonymised to ensure that the clients would not be identified. The study was also performed with quali-

fication from performance venues to ensure that all recorded performances occurred legally.

4. Results

This part offers the main findings, which were based on the data obtained through live performance observations, video analysis, and global questionnaires returned by the dancers around the globe. The results taken from the ballet, contemporary, and hip-hop performances are used for the analysis's framing and for making insights based on the interviews with dancers and choreographers. These results expose an evasive relationship between dance movements, gestures, and cultural expression, indicative of the application of dance as a multimodal semiotic system.

The findings of the international questionnaire also shed more light on the idea of dance being a universal language. The dancers of varying cultural backgrounds stated that despite the styles of dancing being very different (ballet, contemporary, hip-hop), all of the forms conveyed emotions, thoughts, and cultural values in a manner that crossed the language boundaries. This observation greatly confirms the theoretical views of Saussure and Barthes, in

which bodily motions and gestures serve as a kind of signifier in a semiotic system that signifies meaning beyond the verbal word.

As an example, ballet dancers stressed the accuracy and elegance of movements and associated them with such cultural values as beauty and restraint. Contemporary dancers, on the other hand, were more personal and emotional in their expressions, and many resorted to improvisational movements, perhaps a result of Barthes' ideas of culturalization, where spontaneous body movement is marked with a certain cultural connotation.

The reactions of hip-hop dancers also confirmed this argument since their actions, including popping and locking, were explained as the actions of personal empowerment and self-assertion. This can be related to the idea of dance, as a non-verbal and very symbolic language, able to express individual and shared identities."

4.1. Observational Findings

In this section, the following are the main findings regarding observing ballet, contemporary dance, and hip-hop performances, including key concepts such as gesture, emotion, and spatial dynamics (**Figure 2**).

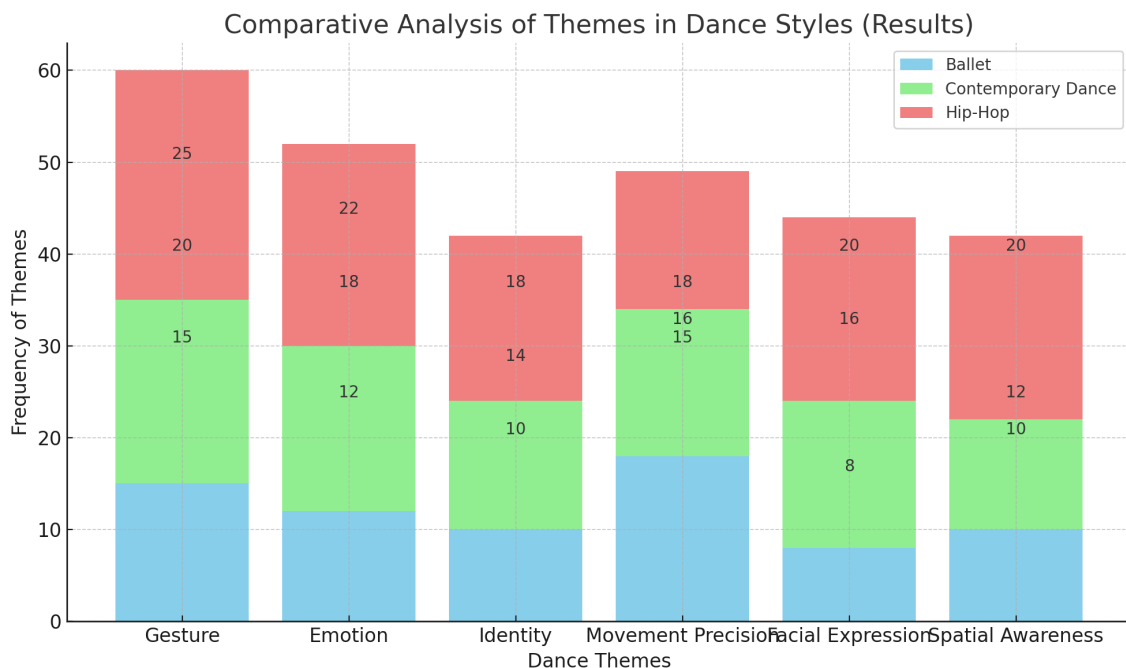


Figure 2. Comparative analysis of themes in dance styles.

Note: The bar chart outlines the prominence of recurring themes throughout the three dance styles: Ballet, Contemporary Dance, and Hip-Hop. The data extracted in the chart highlights how different themes, such as gesture, emotion, and identity, are involved in each style and how unique the semiotic systems are.

4.2. Ballet

Patterns were highly structured and codified in movements during the ballet performances. Each gesture, each way of holding, and each transition was thoroughly rooted in the classical vocabulary of the art form, thus strengthening its position within the rigid semiotic system. These movements were repeated to express particular feelings and stories regulated by the choreographic intents and the dance style.

4.2.1. Body Movements

Ballet, which values grace and precision, uses movements such as the grand jeté to make an allegory of aspiration, strength, and elegance. These movements convey cultural values that revolve around femininity and beauty.

4.2.2. Gestures and Postures

Ballet gestures usually indicate specific roles. For example, a raised hand suggests a commanding one, while other postures represent humility or grace. The dancers' portrayals were in line with what the classical tradition required: the arms and legs conveyed status and social position.

4.2.3. Facial Expressions

The ballet gestures were more delicate, and they coincided with the emotional tempo of the dance. Smiles were saved for times of merriment, and tasteless expressions were used to preserve the dignified mien of the art form. Facial expressions enhanced the dancers' graceful movements under the dance's semiotic functions.

4.2.4. Spatial Dynamics

Ballet's codified spatial relations facilitated exact alignment, which usually maintained symmetry and balance in positioning. The spatial use of the dancers was consciously stratified with the delineation of space and the understanding of how to respect the space of an individual dancer and the salient positioning among the performers.

4.3. Contemporary Dance

By contrast, contemporary dance is less rigid, more fluid and expressive; it involves improvisational movement that avoids strict technicalities. Contemporary performances were characterised by expressive and emotive gestures that helped the dancer express personal and societal themes.

4.3.1. Body Movements

Modern dance movements ranged from smooth and flowing to abrupt and sharp, most often indicating transitions from emotional or physical conditions. The fluidity in the movements enabled spontaneous interpretation, so there was a direct connection between the dancer's feeling and the audience's response.

4.3.2. Gestures and Postures

The gestures were more open and broad, and dancers frequently used wide arms and angular body movements to convey bigger themes of freedom and struggle. These gestures, which were often supplemented with impromptu motions, served as signifiers of a release of emotions and the acts of self-expression.

4.3.3. Facial Expressions

Facial expressions were employed to emphasise emotional depth. Compared to ballet's restraint, contemporary dance features players who use overly fraught facial expressions, usually heightening the emotional set of the performance itself. Such facial clues were highly critical in conveying the emotional tone of the dance.

4.3.4. Spatial Dynamics

Modern dance embraced a more natural use of space, where the dancers moved towards or away from each other, communicating intimacy or severance. The overlapped motions and proximity to each other created intimacy that enabled the performance to capture personal and social strife.

4.4. Hip-Hop

As a dynamic and extremely expressive genre, hip-hop

brought a component of individuality and personal expression. The observational findings regarding hip-hop indicated its focus on individual style and self-representation, and dancers involved in expressive moves were well connected with identification with the culture.

4.4.1. Body Movements

The gestures included popping and locking, which were executed with accuracy and vigour, meaning strength, defiance, and self-assuredness. These movements represented overcoming and individuality, which are hallmarks of hip-hop culture.

4.4.2. Gestures and Postures

Typical hip-hop gestures, such as the “robotic” arm movements or the “freeze” pose, indicated coolness, strut, and defiance. Such gestures were signifiers expressing the performer’s identity and affiliation to the greater cultural movement of hip-hop.

4.4.3. Facial Expressions

In hip hop, facial expressions were bold and gesticulated to show attitude. A serious stare or a big smile exuded confidence or rebellion to augment the dancer’s account.

4.4.4. Spatial Dynamics

The spatial freedom of hip-hop allowed dancers to fill whole performance spaces, drawing on the environment, props, or audience. The movements were not to be restricted to a great extent, as they echoed individualism in the hip-hop culture. Regarding the audience, it was rather dynamic, with performers at times performing for them, thus highlighting the connection between the performer and the viewer.

4.5. Video Analysis Findings

The analysis of the performances’ videos showed different patterns in the sequences of movements, gestures, facial expressions, and spatial relationships revealed during the in-person performances. The video exponentially broke down these elements, a frame at a time, to further

the semiotic deconstruction.

4.6. Movement Sequences and Patterns

The ballet sequence was guided by a rigorous syntax, in which one movement had to follow the other logically. In modern dance, there was more fluidity, and movements were also more improvised than a rigid sequence. The movements were more fluid, almost by default, very dynamic, and highly energetic. Hip-hop was more dynamic, and most movements changed abruptly from one type to another, demonstrating personal style and interpretation.

4.7. Gesture and Facial Expression Analysis

In the video footage, ballet gestures were refined and accurate, sometimes conveying grace, strength, and control. In contemporary dance, the gestures were higher, usually depicting broader emotional expressions. The attitudes of rebellion and confidence that hip-hop values were expressed through the gestures, especially the isolated movements.

The face was minimally expressed in ballet, adding only emotion to the body. In up-to-date dance, the dancers’ faces emphasize someone’s feelings; in hip-hop, the performer’s face should be bold and over-emphasized to add to his or her persona and directed attitude.

4.8. Spatial Relationships in Dance

Formalized formations, distance, and balance maintain the spatial use in ballet. In modern dance, the dancers get close and use this closeness to communicate emotional tension or intimacy. Hip-hop had the most unrestricted space, where dancers would take up the whole stage, symbolic of the freedom in the genre.

4.9. Global Questionnaire Insights

The global questionnaire received answers from dancers worldwide, with different cultures and styles of dance. The findings showed how dance can be considered a universal language in its own right, transcending cultural barriers and serving as a language of communication that is available and understandable to a wide variety of people belonging to various populations.

The international questionnaire showed great agreement among the dancers of different styles that dance is something that crosses all cultural and language boundaries. Ballet, contemporary dance, and hip-hop dancers affirmed that their dance styles expressed feelings, selves, and cultural icons in a manner that reached across any language barriers to resonate with viewers.

These findings were also supported by the interviews. As an example, one of the ballet dancers claimed, Dance in ballet is a language—every movement says something. The basic pirouette is not a mere movement, but a matter of giving the impression of grace and precision. This reaction underlines the restrained and codified execution of ballet in which each motion has cultural connotation.

In the same light, a modern dancer stated, I use dance as a personal language. I do not need words. The body is eloquent—gesture is a conversation with the spectators, the language of emotions. This is in line with the concept of Barthes known as the culturalization, in which the spontaneous expression of the body is codified to take on particular cultural connotations.

As one hip-hop dancer stated, popping, locking, and such moves allow me to express strength, empowerment, and identity. It is a self-confidence thing that anyone can experience. It shows the individuality and empowerment aspect of hip-hop that sounds beyond language and cultural barriers.

4.9.1. Common Themes Across Dance Styles

Universal Communication: Many respondents confirmed that dance is a nonverbal language that communicates feelings, stories, and identities without using words. Dancers working in ballet, contemporary, and hip-hop mentioned that movements, notwithstanding being culturally based, have the potential to break language barriers and connect to audiences worldwide.

4.9.2. Cultural Expression

The questionnaire also showed that dancers worldwide employ dance as a medium of conveying cultural identity, either in the highly fixed form of ballet, the expressive form of contemporary dance, or the self-assertive form of hip-hop. This is consistent with the theory of culturaliza-

tion proposed by Barthes, whereby dance codes are simultaneously spontaneous and systematic.

4.10. Cross-Cultural Semiotic Application

By analyzing the responses from the questionnaire and comparing them with the observational and video analysis, this study aims to validate the idea of dance as a universal language. The dance in all three genres (ballet, contemporary dance, and hip-hop) came out as a semiotic system, which carries meaning through the body, gestures, facial expressions, and space. In classical ballet, poised or in the expressive improvisation of contemporary dance and hip-hop, dance works through structured signs reverberating in non-cultural and linguistic climes. These proved the overall impact of dance as a means of communicating a person's expression and collective cultural narration worldwide.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that dance is a multimodal semiotic system similar to a language in its sign-system character, in which bodily movements, gestures, facial expressions, and spatial dynamics become signifiers of value and meaning. This research is consistent with the view that dance is an art and a system of organised communication with signs that operate in particular cultural and social situations.

5.1. Dance as a Universal Language

The most remarkable effect of the study is the finding that dance, regardless of the type, can be used as a universal language. The answers from the dancers worldwide prove that nonverbal communication of movement is understood worldwide, overcoming the obstacles of linguistics and cultures. This concept supports Barthes's and Saussure's theorising, where meaning is written on words and the body.

As can be judged from the global questionnaire, dance is perceived to be a non-verbal language, in which emotions, ideas, and cultural values can be delivered to different audiences worldwide. From the ballet's exact motions to the inner world of contemporary dance and the hip-hop's expressiveness of self, the dancers from all regions

and environments called out the universality of dance as a means to communicate. This highlights the multi-modal aspect of dance in that the body language represents a symbolic language understood in other cultures.

5.2. The Gesture and Facial Expression in Dance

The research proved that gestures and facial expressions are essential in the multimodal dance system. In ballet, gestures communicate controlled and organised meanings, which depict cultural values of grace and strength. Gestures and facial expressions acquire a more expressive role in contemporary dance, allowing dancers to express their inner emotional states. In hip hop, gestures reflect individual identity and cultural values and contain attitude and rebellion. This gives credence to the fact that gestures and facial expressions are intrinsic to dance's ability to convey meaning beyond the spoken word.

5.3. Key Findings

The outcomes of the conducted research demonstrate that dance is a semiotic system that creates meanings relying on a systematic arrangement of the signifiers (movements, gestures, facial expressions, and space). Dance, whether the well-structured and codified movements of ballet, the flowing and emotional of contemporary dance, or hip-hop, fast and exclusive from the others, is a multimodal mode of communication which functions as a cultural system of signs and an individual system of signification.

The findings revealed that gestures and facial expressions are significant when indicating emotions and stories in dance. Such nonverbal components add to the meaning of the messages conveyed by the physical movements they complement. In ballet, gestures are usually constricted and delicate, emphasising control and grace, while the gestures in contemporary dance are more exuberant and represent individual emotions and challenges. Different gestures and facial expressions in hip-hop are signifiers of confidence, rebellion, and individuality.

Space also became an essential factor in dance communication. The formal approach to using space in ballet accentuates balance and symmetry. At the same time, mod-

ern dance and hip-hop represent the more dynamic and intimate use of space that corresponds to the emotional and personal aspects of the performance. Spatial relationships between dancers and the audience play an essential role in the narrative and emotional elements of the performance.

In addition, the global questionnaire strengthened the suggestion that dance is a universal language. Dances and Choreographers' responses from countries worldwide revealed that dance is widely comprehended, irrespective of cultural and stylistic differences, as a non-linguistic method of communication. This underpins the idea that dance can become a symbolic system that can communicate on a universal basis, bearing emotions and stories that can be identified by people belonging to different cultures.

The importance of gestures and facial expression in dance came out in the interviews. As one of the ballet dancers explained, A raised hand or a particular position of the foot will mean various themes which the audience will identify at once. This illustrates how the ballet movements can be considered as signifiers in a cultural code, sustaining the theory of Saussure that signifiers (physical gestures) can depict a certain meaning.

In modern dance, the facial expression is more visible most of the time, as stated by a modern dancer: 'The instant the audience can relate to my inner world when my face says what I feel inside.' This confirms the notion of dance transcending physical gestures as regioned by Barthes, whereby bodily gesture and facial expression assume central role in the entire semiotic system of dance.

The gestures in hip-hop were used to underline the identity of the dancer and his or her culture. As one of the interviewees stated, popping and locking are personal empowerments. This coincides with the idea stated by Barthes of culturalization wherein the movements in the dance bear both personal and societal codes, that is, self-expression and resistance.

5.4. Implications of the Study of Dance as a Language

This study has far-reaching implications for the conceptualisation of dance beyond the capacity of dance as an art. It implies that dance should not only be considered as a performing practice but as a formal system of communication with its syntax (composition), semantics (meaning of

movements), and pragmatics (context and emotional tone of movements). Dance, as a multimodal semiotic system, employs diverse expressions of the body, cultural codes, and contextual elements to produce meanings.

Applying linguistic and semiotic theories to dance, this research brings a new perspective to interpreting the communication of non-verbal art forms. Just as the written or spoken language utilises words to express an idea, dance employs movements, gestures, and placement of bodies in space to express emotions, identities, and tales. Moreover, assuming dance as a language, this work emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of dance studies, providing new vistas for study that create a juncture between linguistics, semiotics, and cultural studies.

The study also proved that dance, whether it is ballet, contemporary, or hip-hop, is a kind of universal language. According to one of the ballet dancers, he or she noted that, when they perform, the audience recognizes the emotion of elegance, regardless of the lack of culture. In the same manner, hip-hop dancers accentuated the process in which the techniques, such as popping and locking, could produce the effect of power and confidence in various cultures.

These observations align with the concept of Saussures' theory of signs and Barthes' cultural codes, suggesting that dance is a universal communication system. The interview replies supported the assumption that, although the forms of dance were different, the meaning, which is encoded in movements, gestures, and facial expressions, overcomes the linguistic barrier and is perceived by everyone in the same way.

5.5. Dance as a Universal Language

One of the most important results of this research is the claim that dance can be a universal language with no boundaries. The answers from the global questionnaire reveal that, notwithstanding the range of dancing styles in diverse cultures, there is a common understanding that dance can convey emotions, ideas, and narratives that cross cultural boundaries. Regardless of the fluid gestures of ballet, the passionate gestures of contemporary dance, or the boldness of hip-hop, dance unites the human population in expressing the universal human experiences.

This perspective coincides with Barthes's paradigm

of "culturalization," where movements and gestures, sublimated locally, conquer the world with their general semantic filling. The conclusion emphasises that dance (with various forms) is a symbolic language recognised and appreciated by people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

5.6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this work allows a comprehensive view of dance as a multimodal semiotic system, further studies should discuss several limitations. First, only three kinds of dance forms were the focus of the study. Ballet, contemporary dance, and hip-hop. Although these forms cover a wide range of dances, other cultural dances may be used to enhance our understanding of dance as a universal language. Further research may focus on different dance forms, like traditional folk dances, modern experimental dances, or native dance rituals, to understand better how dance operates in various cultures.

Second, the work focused mainly on observations and video analysis of performances, which might be unable to bring out the spontaneity of dance. It is possible to conduct future research using ethnographic methods like participant observation or in-depth interviews to better understand how dancers perceive and interpret movement in real-time. In addition, more studies may explore how audiences view and interpret dance movements, thus exposing how meaning is transmitted through dance in a live setting.

This study was primarily focused on the linguistic aspects of dance. However, it is possible to go deeper and discuss dance's emotional and psychological dimensions as a means of communication. What are the emotional experiences of dancers and audience, and how do they influence meaning-making? Further research can examine the affective and psychological responses to the dance and how movement creates emotional and cognitive interpretations of the dancers and spectators.

This research has added to the knowledge on dance as a multimodal semiotic system and demonstrated how body movements, gestures, faces, and spatial dynamics combine to create meaning. By using linguistic and semiotic theories to dance, it has been shown that dance is a language with its syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The

research is consistent with the proposition that dance, in all its variations, may provide grounds for a universal language that disregards cultural barriers and differences in languages and unites people based on their everyday human experiences.

This research provides interesting prospects for further study in dance. Thus, dance can be a powerful tool for intercultural communication and global awareness. As a nonverbal language, dance assumes an even more critical role as the world becomes more interconnected and offers a unique avenue for people and communities to express thoughts and feelings, tell stories, and overcome differences.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary and Interpretation of Key Findings

This study explored dance as a multimodal semiotic system and confirmed its power as both an art form and a language of the body. It drew on Saussure's theory of semiosis, Barthes's idea of culturalization, and Husserl's view of pre-reflexive embodiment to explain how movement can create meaning. Three dance forms were selected—ballet, contemporary dance, and hip-hop—to represent a wide range of cultural and expressive traditions. The research used live observation, video analysis, interviews, and a global questionnaire to gather perspectives from diverse contexts. The findings showed that bodily movement, gesture, facial expression, and spatial use all function as meaningful signs. Ballet communicated elegance, balance, and discipline through its precise vocabulary. Contemporary dance embodied freedom, fluidity, and emotional openness. Hip-hop expressed strength, rebellion, and individuality with striking clarity. Responses from dancers around the world strongly confirmed that dance transcends cultural and linguistic borders. They described dance as a universal language that tells stories, conveys identities, and shares emotions without words. These results highlight the remarkable ability of dance to serve as a bridge between cultures and as a deeply human form of symbolic expression.

6.2. Contributions and Implications

This research brings new value to the study of language and meaning. It shows that dance is more than an art form; it is also a system of communication. Dance has its own syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, which work like the rules of a body language. Movements link together like words in a sentence, while gestures act as cultural codes that give shared meaning. In this way, dance becomes a structured system of signs that can tell stories and express emotions. The study expands semiotic and linguistic theory by applying them to performance and movement. It also gives clear practical insights. In education, dance can help students understand communication and cultural awareness in ways that words alone cannot. In cultural exchange, dance can act as a bridge between groups, creating understanding without speech. Choreographers and teachers may see their work as a language that reaches across cultures, while policymakers may use dance as a form of cultural diplomacy. By presenting dance as a multimodal semiotic system, this study shows that the body is both expressive and symbolic, able to share meaning and values across communities.

6.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study focused on ballet, contemporary dance, and hip-hop. Other dance traditions, such as folk or ritual dances, were not included. The data came from observation, video analysis, and interviews, which gave valuable insights but did not show the full range of live performance or spontaneous movement. Audience response was also not studied in detail. Future research can use ethnography and larger multimodal corpora to capture more natural contexts. It can also look at how audiences understand and react to dance as a semiotic system. Comparative studies with folk and indigenous dances could show how local traditions use the body as a sign system. Future work should also study the emotional and psychological impact of dance on both dancers and viewers. This would help explain how movement creates shared meaning, and how dance shapes communication, culture, and identity in many settings.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Acknowledgments

The author sincerely thanks Guangzhou College of Commerce for its support. The school's helpful environment and useful resources made this research possible. The author also wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback, which contributed to the refinement of this article.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

No new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Interview minutes.

| Inter-view ID | Dancer Type | Time of Interview | Question | Response |
|---------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|
| 1 | Ballet Dancer | 10:00 AM | How do you see dance as a form of communication? | "Dance in ballet is like a language—every movement speaks something. A simple pirouette isn't just an action; it's about conveying grace and precision." |
| 2 | Ballet Dancer | 10:15 AM | Do you think dance can transcend linguistic barriers? | "Absolutely. A ballet performance communicates the same emotions, regardless of where it is performed. When I perform, the audience understands the feeling of elegance." |
| 3 | Contemporary Dancer | 11:00 AM | What role do facial expressions play in your dance? | "Facial expressions are everything in contemporary dance. I use them to reflect the emotion behind my movements—sometimes, the movement isn't enough. My face tells the story." |
| 4 | Contemporary Dancer | 11:10 AM | How do you interpret dance as a language? | "Dance is a personal language for me. I don't need words. The body speaks volumes—movement becomes a dialogue with the audience, expressing emotions." |
| 5 | Hip-Hop Dancer | 2:00 PM | How do you feel dance conveys self-expression? | "Through moves like popping and locking, I communicate strength, empowerment, and identity. It's an act of self-assurance that anyone can feel." |
| 6 | Hip-Hop Dancer | 2:15 PM | Do you think dance transcends cultural boundaries? | "Definitely. When I perform, people from all over connect with my movements, even if we don't speak the same language. It's a universal form of expression." |
| 7 | Choreographer (Ballet) | 3:00 PM | How do you incorporate cultural codes into choreography? | "In ballet, every gesture is culturally coded. A raised hand or a specific foot position signifies different themes. The audience recognizes these cues." |
| 8 | Choreographer (Contemporary Dance) | 3:30 PM | How do you use space to enhance your choreography? | "Space is crucial in contemporary dance. The movement is often about breaking boundaries. How dancers use space, whether intimate or distant, conveys emotion." |
| 9 | Choreographer (Hip-Hop) | 4:00 PM | How does the audience's perception influence your choreography? | "I'm aware that hip-hop resonates differently with each audience. The energy we bring to the stage—our gestures, facial expressions—directly affect their experience." |

Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire

For Dancers:

- What is your form of dance communication?
- Is it in your belief that your movements exist to carry particular messages, feelings, or ideas? Can you give an example of how, through movement, you speak without saying words?
- Does dance seem like a language to you?
- If that is the case, what are the basic components that make dance a language? How do you read movements, gestures, and facial expressions in the context of this language?
- How do gestures and facial expressions add meaning to your movements and performance?
- How do you incorporate or use gestures/facial expressions to add or complement the story/emotion you are portraying through the dance?
- What does the use of space do to the meaning of your performance?
- Are you carried by the feeling of closeness to other dancers in conveying the events and emotions that you wish to communicate? What impact do your relationships with the surrounding space have on the general performance?
- Does one think consciously when organising motion to communicate particular feelings or motives?
- Is finding how to design or interpret your movements to conform to some emotional or narrative ideas possible?
- What place does improvisation have in your dance practice and performances?
- Does improvisation help you to convey emotions or ideas in a more personal and immediate manner? How do you ensure that improvised movements still contribute to the meaning of the dance?
- What sense does your audience get from your movements?
- Do you consider there is an accepted perception that dance movements or cultural or personal backgrounds affect the viewers' understanding of the dance?
- What are the ways that working with other dancers deepens the semiotic meaning of the performance?
- During group performances, how do you ensure that ev-

ery dancer's movements correspond to the general meaning or message being conveyed?

- Do you believe that dance can become a universal language that can be heard by people from different cultures or with a different linguistic background?
- Based on your experience, can dance cross cultural and language barriers? How can it be used as a method of cross-cultural communication?

For Choreographers:

- In what way can you conceptualize dance as a language system?
- What items in your choreography (such as movements, gestures, facial expressions) do you take as part of the communication system? What is the way to ensure the dance communicates to the audience without words?
- How does the motion of hands and face contribute to your choreography?
- How can you incorporate these nonverbal aspects into your choreography and use them to express certain feelings, themes, or stories?
- How do you make decisions regarding the emotional tone or narrative through movement?
- What is the effect of movements, poses, and facial expressions as cooperators of the emotional or thematic content of the choreography?
- How do you use space as a tool of meaning in your choreography?
- Do you use space to communicate connections, or the absence of connections, between dancers, or to express particular feelings, stories, or culture? How does the use of space relate to movement in your work?
- Do you rely on the element of technicality or the aspect of personal interpretation in your choreography?
- What freedom do you give dancers to interpret and personalize the movements, without interfering with the dance's integrity and storyline?
- Are you ever concerned about the audience's interpretation when making choreography?
- How does one explain audience reactions or interpretations to one's work? Is there a message that you want to convey, or is it open to interpretation?
- What is your technique of integrating improvisation in choreography?
- Do you allow room for improvisation in the act, and if

so, how are you going to ensure that it does not undermine the overall meaning and style of the piece?

- In what way do cultural or social themes affect your choreography?
- How do you include cultural codes, social issues, or personal experience in choreography? How do these themes affect the audience's perception of the performance?
- In what way is the idea of dance as a universal language in tandem with your work?
- As dance is neither influenced by language nor culture, can it convey any messages? What contribution does your choreography make to this thought?
- Are facial expressions and gestures universal in different cultures?
- How do you design such elements to convey the same message to a worldwide audience?

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