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NONVERBAL REGISTER OF FISHERMEN IN DEMAK COASTAL COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the phenomenon of nonverbal registers in the communication practices of fishermen in the Demak coastal community. The research was conducted to identify, classify, and interpret the forms, meanings, and context of forming the nonverbal registers used in the fishermen's daily interactions. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. Methodological and source triangulation were employed to ensure the validity of findings. Drawing on sociolinguistic theory, particularly Halliday's register framework, the analysis reveals that fishermen in the Demak coastal community employ a structured system of nonverbal communication that can be grouped into three main categories: registers related to fish species, fishing conditions, and fishing results. These registers not only help overcome barriers to verbal communication, such as engine noise, wind, and distance at sea, but also serve broader sociocultural purposes. Specifically, they facilitate efficient communication, strengthen collective identity, and reinforce social hierarchies between juragan (boat owners) and pandega (crew members). The findings underscore that nonverbal registers operate as a distinctive semiotic system within the fishermen community, reflecting adaptation to the work environment while simultaneously embodying local cultural values. This study contributes to documenting linguistic variation in occupational settings and highlights the importance of preserving traditional communicative practices in coastal communities.

Keywords: *nonverbal register, fishermen, sociolinguistics, Demak coastal community*

INTRODUCTION

Language is an important part of human identity and culture, and it shapes how humans perceive and interact with the world around them. (Hernawan et al., 2025). Language as a communication tool is represented not only in verbal form, but also through nonverbal cues, which are packaged in a form without using words. (Kustiawan et al., 2022). Different types of communication needs can lead to different forms of language used. These differences develop along with the social needs of each individual or group, resulting in variations in language use. (Oentari, 2024; Satriyo et al., 2025). This linguistic phenomenon is present in the midst of the life of the fishermen community, especially in coastal areas such as Purworejo village, Bonang district, Demak regency (PBD), where speech events often face situations that demand communication efficiency.

One form of such linguistic variation is nonverbal register communication, which is a system of signs or distinctive signs that are only understood by certain communities for the purpose of functional interaction. (Widiyanarti et al., 2024). Nonverbal language refers to a mode of communication that operates without the use of spoken or written words. Instead, it transmits meaning through observable physical signals such as facial expressions, gestures, body posture, eye contact,

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and other behavioral cues that function to deliver messages or information. (Febriani et al., 2024).

Sign language is not only used to communicate with deaf groups, as in the research of Wedayanti et al. (2021), but in fishermen in the Demak coastal community, where sign language, or in this study called nonverbal registers, is used by the fishermen groups who can speak spoken language. Salahuddin (2025) said that language can vary because it is influenced by various factors such as geographical location, social status, and the profession of the speaker. Each social group tends to create its own communication arbitrariness as a marker of group identity. PBD is one of the coastal villages where the majority of the population makes a living as fishermen. Data states that the majority of the population of PBD works as fishermen, with a total of 3,120 people (Indrawarsih & Ratri, 2023). Figure 1 shows the location of fishermen in Demak coastal community.

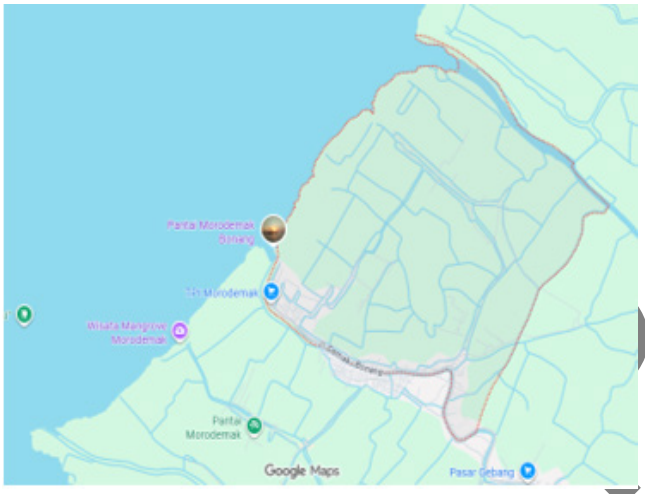

Figure 1 Location of fishermen in the Demak coastal community

The fishing community in this village has a nonverbal communication system that is used to convey messages efficiently, both at sea, in port, and on land in daily interactions. Examples of data on nonverbal registers, such as hand gesture symbols to give a cue when telling to shut down or slow down the machine, are real examples of nonverbal register forms that are consistently used and interpreted together. In this context, sociolinguistic studies are essential. Sociolinguistics is a correlational study, meaning that this study seeks to find correlations between language and social factors. (Wijana, 2021). Sociolinguistic studies not only include language variations based on social factors, but also pay attention to the use of registers, which are forms of language used in specific contexts. This view is in line with Halliday's (1978) theory, which states that registers are forms of language variation that are born from repetitive situational contexts and have a specific function.

A register is a linguistic variation in a group of people formed due to a particular occupation. In this case, differences in occupation, job title, location, and background can result in differences in the language used (Aryanti et al., 2023). Ilawati & Kuntoro (2025) emphasizes that registers not only represent a purely communicative function but also reflect social identity. Registers are often used in certain communities or work environments, where the use of language must be fast, precise, and efficient. In such a situation, a special term or expression is formed that is understood only by the members of the group, making the register an indicator of solidarity as well as a tool of work. Based on this description, it can be concluded that registers are linguistic variations that arise in the situation of certain speech events and reflect relationships with specific professional social groups, as well as being influenced by the context of the participants (P1 and P2), place, and specific intentions.

A method for documenting language through the use of field research, which involves language researchers visiting the communities where the language is spoken and collecting data through various methods such as interviews, recordings, and observations. Language documentation in Indonesia is still closely linked to language descriptions in the field of descriptive linguistics or theoretical linguistics. (Budiono & Yanita, 2024). The data collected through fieldwork can be analyzed to better understand the form and meaning of the language. The form, meaning, and context of forming the nonverbal register used are studied with the concept of Halliday (1978), based on the context of the situation, namely, *field, tenor,* and *mode. Field* relates to ideational meaning, tenor describes interpersonal meaning, while mode expresses textual meaning in discourse. Thus, the study of nonverbal registers in the fishermen of the Demak coastal community is significant to reveal how this distinctive communication system is formed and becomes part of their professional identity.

Previous research on fishermen's registers has been carried out extensively, including a study from Triana & Khotimah (2021) that examined the Java language register in fishermen in Mujungagung Village, Kramat, Tegal, focusing on the form and factors of the register. The next study from Wijayanti & Fatimah (2022) examined the register in the speech of fishing sports broadcasters. Next, from Sakinah et al. (2022), who examined ale-ale fishermen's registers in Suka Bangun Village, Ketapang, focused on the form of the emergence of registers. Another study from Jumriah et al. (2023) highlighted the register at fish sellers at Gunung Jaya Market, East Kolaka, which focuses on the form and function of the register. Furthermore, a study from Faridah & Kuntoro (2025) examined fishermen's registers in Adipala, Cilacap, focusing on the lexical variations and patterns that form the register. Finally, Nurkhikmah and Lestari, (2025) examine the register of fishermen in Dinuk Village, Tegal, which focuses on the form and function of the register.

Although there have been many studies

on fisherman registers, there have not been many studies that highlight the form of nonverbal registers in fishing communities in Indonesia. Until now, studies on nonverbal registers, especially in fishing communities, are still very limited. Previous studies have highlighted the verbal register more. Therefore, this research is important and relevant in filling this gap by answering the research question, what are the form, meaning, and context of forming nonverbal registers used in the fishermen's daily interactions in the Demak coastal community? This research is also expected to contribute to the documentation of traditional communication and the preservation of local wisdom in the field of linguistics, and also contribute to nonverbal communication studies.

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand phenomena in a natural social context through in-depth interaction between the researcher and the subject (Waruwu, 2024). The data collected consists of words and images obtained from a fisherman as the informant. The data source is located in Purworejo village, Bonang district, Demak regency (PBD).

Data collection methods were conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. In this study, triangulation methods are used to check the correctness of data from different sources and several methods, and source triangulation is used to clarify the differences between different sources in the same fishing community. Through the observation method and observation techniques, the researcher used to simulate nonverbal speech events that occurred at the research site. The interview technique is to find out and dig up the register and its meaning. The researcher also conducted documentation to take pictures of the nonverbal registers of informants. With the criteria of informants: 1) at least 25 years old; 2) born and raised in PBD; 3) working as a fisherman; 4) interactive and communicative; and 5) have a traditional canoe. The informants consisted of six people, including HAB (53), ULU (32), SAM (30), ANW (56), KAM (54), and HUS (39). The observation period lasted for five months, but one of the authors is a native of PBD who has observed and been familiar with the register since childhood. Focus group discussions with fishermen were held twice, with each meeting lasting two hours.

Data analysis uses an interactive model, including data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion-making. Then, the true meaning is determined based on the interpretation of the participants and the context of the speech situation. The technique used to analyze the data is a contextual technique. Dwi Purnanto (2020:9) explained that research that uses contextual techniques refers to a comprehensive framework of register analysis as a form of language use by considering the social, situational, and cultural aspects behind it. The results of the data analysis are presented by an informal method. This article uses a sociolinguistic theoretical approach, as it examines the use of language used by a group of people who work as fishermen.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The language used by fishermen in the Demak coastal community (PBD) is clearly distinguished into verbal and nonverbal forms within daily communication and fishing activities. The nonverbal registers identified at the research site are categorized into fish species, fishing conditions, and fishing results. These categories are presented in Table 1..

Table 1 Nonverbal Register Categories

No	Category	Register	Amount
1	Fish species	Anchovies [tƏri], White anchovies [tƏrinasi], Squid [nUs], Long jawed mackerel [kƏmbUŋ], Shrimp [uraŋ], Mantis Shrimp [uraŋsikat], and Crab [pitEŋ]	7
2	Fishing condition	Mesh is broken, Mesh stuck, Asking for help, machine off/small, Propeller change, and Rope condition	6
3	Fishing result	Thermos/Full, Failed	2
		Total	15

Table 1 shows that the nonverbal registers contained in the research area are categorized into 3 categories out of 15 data, namely categories based on fish species, fishing conditions, and fishing result. The category with the most dominant data is the fish category, with 7 nonverbal register data. This is due to the variety of fish in the sea that are the target of fishermen's catches in the research area.

The existence of this register reflects fishermen's adaptation to their work environment. It also demonstrates a distinctive communication system that has been collectively developed within the fishing community. Fishermen in PBD are divided into 8 types, namely [miñaŋmƆtE?], [miñaŋmbƆga], [miñaŋŋarat], [miñaŋnjarIŋ], [miñaŋñƆdƆ], [miñaŋ njƏba?], [miñaŋmbranjaŋ], and [miñaŋŋapal].

The first category of nonverbal register to be discussed is the category of fish. A cue to mention the catch of the sea. In Table 2, it is known that seven data points fall into this category. The form and meaning of the fish category register are as follows.

Several nonverbal registers were identified in this category of communication. The first register is the anchovy register, which is realized through an inverted little finger pointing gesture, as illustrated

in Figure 2. This register functions as a medium of information exchange regarding anchovy catches. In practice, the fisherman (P1) initiates communication by producing the anchovy signal to inquire about the catch from another fisherman (P2). Subsequently, P2 responds by displaying numerical signals indicating the quantity of fish caught or by presenting a nonverbal signal representing the fishing result category. This register is predominantly used by fishermen who focus on catching squid, anchovies, and mackerel, locally termed [miñaŋŋarat] by the Purworejo village, Bonang district, Demak regency. The use of this register may occur both while fishing activities are still in progress at sea and after the fishing vessels have docked.

Table 2 Nonverbal Register of Fish Species Categories

Category	Register	Amount
Fish species	Anchovies [tƟri], White anchovies [tƟrinasi], Squid [nUs], Long jawed mackerel [kƟmbUŋ], Shrimp [uraŋ], Mantis Shrimp [uraŋsikat], and Crab [pitEŋ]	7

Figure 2 Anchovies Nonverbal

The second nonverbal register is associated with white anchovy catches. This register is expressed through hand movements resembling the act of bringing food toward the mouth, as presented in Figure 3. This gesture is used when P1 seeks information regarding white anchovy catches from P2. Communication is initiated by P1 through a specific gesture, followed by P2's response through numerical indicators of catch quantity or by signaling the category of fishing results. This communicative practice occurs in maritime fishing contexts, including during fishing operations at sea and upon returning to the dock. This register is commonly employed by fishermen targeting anchovies, white anchovies, and shrimp, which are locally referred to as [miñaŋñƆdƆ].

The squid register is characterized by a pecking-like hand movement involving rhythmic opening and closing motions that resemble squid tentacle movements, as shown in Figure 4. This register is predominantly used among fishermen known locally as [miñaŋŋarat]. In communicative practice, P1 employs this gesture to inquire about squid catches from P2. P2 subsequently responds to numerical catch indicators or by displaying a general fishing result signal. Such interactions may occur either during fishing activities at sea or after fishermen have arrived at the harbor.

Figure 3 White Anchovies Nonverbal

Figure 4 Squid Nonverbal

The next nonverbal cue that appears in the long jawed mackerel register, and similar contexts, is the movement of swinging the palm left and right, as shown in Figure 5. This signal often occurs when fishermen (P1) ask fishermen from other boats (P2) about mackerel catches and similar topics. Typically, this signal is observed among fishermen [miñaŋŋarat]. This speech event takes place when fishermen are still searching for fish in the sea or when they have arrived at the pier and are sorting mackerel and similar catches. P1 proposes mackerel cues and related signals, then P2 responds by displaying the numerical cue and category of the fishing result, or simply the cue of the fishing result category.

The shrimp register is represented by a gesture involving the partial extension of the index finger, as shown in Figure 6. This register appears when P1 inquires about shrimp catches from P2. P2 responds by indicating numerical information and catch

category signals. This form of communication occurs in multiple fishing contexts, including at sea, during transit toward the dock, and during shrimp sorting activities on land. This register is primarily used by fishermen specializing in shrimp fishing and is locally referred to by the Purworejo Village community as [miñaŋnjarIŋ].

Figure 5 Long Jawed Mackerel Nonverbal

Figure 6 Shrimp Nonverbal

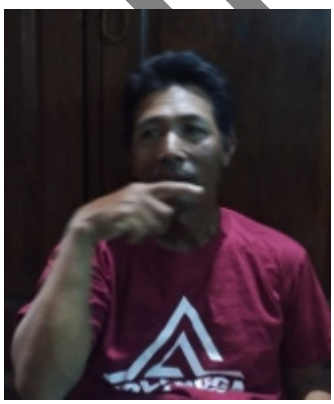

Figure 7 Mantis Shrimp Nonverbal

The mantis shrimp register, locally known as [uraŋsikat], is characterized by the movement of the index finger in front of the mouth followed by lateral brushing motions, resembling a tooth-brushing action. As shown in Figure 7, this signal is used when a fisherman [miñaŋŋarat] obtains a live mantis shrimp measuring approximately 6–10 inches. In this communicative context, P1 inquires whether P2 has captured a mantis shrimp. The interaction typically occurs after the fishing boat has docked. If a mantis shrimp is obtained, P2 responds by displaying numerical catch signals accompanied by a mantis shrimp-specific gesture. Conversely, if no mantis shrimp is obtained, P2 provides a signal representing the general category of fishing results.

Finally, in this category, Figure 8 shows a nonverbal register cue that appears for the crab register. This gesture is in the shape of an index finger and a thumb forming a semicircle, or like making a crab claw. Usually this signal is found in fishermen [miñaŋŋarat] and [miñaŋnjƏba?]. This signal often appears in the context when fishermen [miñaŋŋarat] and [miñaŋnjƏba?] get crabs alive, so the fisherman (P1) asks the other fisherman (P2) if he gets crabs. This speech event usually occurs when the boat is already docked. P1 proposed a crab signal, then P2 answered, 1) if you get a crab, then by brandishing a number signal and a crab signal; and 2) if you don't get crabs, then by giving a signal for the category of fishing result.

Figure 8 Crab Nonverbal

Table 3 Nonverbal Register of Fishing Condition Categories

Category	Register	Amount
Fishing condition	Mesh is broken, Mesh stuck, Asking for help, machine off/ small, Propeller change, and Rope condition	6

The second category of nonverbal communication that will be discussed is the category of fishing conditions. In Table 3, it is known that 6 data points fall into this category. The form and meaning of the register of the category of fishing conditions are as follows.

The first nonverbal cues that appear for the torn mesh register are with the right hand in front of the

body horizontally and the palm facing down, while the left hand is next to the head vertically. This register can be seen in Figure 9. This signal often appears in the context when the fisherman (P1) informs the fisherman in the same boat (P2) of the condition of the torn net. This speech event usually occurs when the fisherman is still in the sea after pulling the net. P1 is in front of the boat, while P2 is in the back driving the boat, or vice versa. P1 gave a signal to P2 about the fishing condition, namely, the net used was torn. This signal can appear in all types of fishermen in Purworejo village, Bonang district, Demak regency.

Figure 9 The Mesh is Broken Nonverbal

The second nonverbal cue that appears for the torn mesh register [payaŋñaŋkɔ̃l] is represented by a vertically clenched right-hand movement. As illustrated in Figure 10, this gesture is used when P1 informs P2 about fishing equipment being obstructed or caught on underwater objects. This communication typically occurs while hauling fishing nets at sea. In this interaction, P1 and P2 may occupy different positions on the boat, either at the front or rear section. The signal conveys that the fishing net has become entangled with submerged objects such as wood embedded in the seabed, locally referred to as [patɔ?]. This register is widely used among fishermen at the research location, regardless of fishing specialization.

Figure 10 Mesh Stuck Nonverbal

The third register is associated with the help-request signal, locally known as [eseri]. This register is expressed by raising the right hand vertically and subsequently touching the cloth carried by the fisherman. As shown in Figure 11, this signal is used when P1 requires assistance and communicates this condition to fishermen on another boat (P2). This situation typically occurs at sea when mechanical problems arise, such as engine failure or diesel fuel depletion, preventing the boat engine from operating. After receiving the signal, P2 typically provides immediate assistance. This register is commonly used among fishermen categorized as [miñaŋŋarat], [miñaŋnjarIŋ], and [miñaŋñɔ̃dɔ̃].

Figure 11 Asking for Help Nonverbal

The next nonverbal cue that appears to register shutting down or slowing down the engine speed is the right hand stretching forward and the palm moving up and down, with a time of 2-3 seconds. This register can be seen in Figure 12. This signal often appears in the context when the fisherman (P1) tells the fisherman in the same boat (P2) to slow down or shut down. This speech event usually occurs when fishermen in the sea are monitoring fish, and also when heading to the dock. P1 was in front of the boat, looking at the current of the water and the boat in front of him, while P2 was in the back driving the boat. P1 signals P2 about fishing conditions, i.e., shutting down or slowing down engine speed. This cue can appear in all types of fishermen at the research site.

The fifth register is associated with propeller replacement signals. This register is expressed by forming a fist-like grip and rotating the arm alternately to the right and left for 2–3 seconds, as shown in Figure 13. This signal is used when P1 instructs P2 to replace a damaged propeller. Such communication may occur both at sea and at the dock. In this interaction, P1, typically acting as the boat owner or captain, gives instructions to P2 to immediately replace the damaged propeller. P2 generally acknowledges and complies with the instruction. This register is commonly used among fishermen categorized as [miñaŋŋarat], [miñaŋnjarIŋ], and [miñaŋñɔ̃dɔ̃].

Figure 12 Machine Off-Small Nonverbal

Figure 13 Propeller Change Nonverbal

Figure 14 Rope condition nonverbal

Finally, in this category, the next nonverbal cue that appears to register the condition of the rope is to stretch both hands. The form of this register can be seen in Figure 14. This speech event usually occurs when fishermen are already on the pier. This cue often appears in the context when fishermen (P1) ask other fishermen (P2) about the fishing conditions [tawUr], such as how long the rope is and the size [sa? DƏpƆ]. P1 asks by signaling to P2 about the length of the rope condition used by P2 when going to sea [tawUr], then P2 answers with numerical cues and rope conditions. This signal is common in the type of fisherman [miñaŋŋarat].

Table 4 Nonverbal Register of Fishing Result Categories

Category	Register	Amount
Fishing result	Thermos/Full, Failed	2

The third category of nonverbal communication that will be discussed is the category of fishing results. In Table 4, it is known that 2 data points fall into this category. The form and meaning of the register of the fishing category are as follows.

Thermoses are tools used by fishermen at the research site to become containers for fish caught. The first nonverbal cue that appears for the thermos or full register is with the right hand horizontally in front of the chest, then moves to the right and left for 2-3 seconds, can be seen in Figure 15. This gesture often appears in the context when the fisherman (P1) asks the fisherman from another boat (P2) about his catch at sea. P1 proposed a fish category signal, then P2 answered with a numerical signal and a signal register of the fishing results: thermos or full. This speech event usually occurs when fishermen are already at the pier while sorting fish. This signal is common in the type of fisherman [miñaŋŋarat], [miñaŋnjarIŋ], and [miñaŋñƆdƆ].

Figure 15 Thermos/full nonverbal

Another nonverbal register is associated with the condition of failing to obtain fish, locally termed [kaƆw]. This register is expressed through a hand-waving gesture, as illustrated in Figure 16. This signal appears when P1 asks P2 about fishing results while at sea. In this interaction, P1 provides a fish category signal, and P2 responds by displaying a nonverbal signal indicating that no fish were caught. Such communicative events typically occur when fishermen have already returned to the dock. This register is widely used among fishermen classified as [miñaŋŋarat], [miñaŋnjarIŋ], and [miñaŋñƆdƆ].

Figure 16 Failed Nonverbal

The forms of registers used by the fishing community have been identified, discussed, and then focused on in the context of forming the register. The context of registering is an important aspect to understand because, through the function and role of the register in social interaction, it can be known how the fishing community adjusts to working conditions and builds an effective communication system. By referring to Halliday's theory (1978), this study will reveal that the use of registers by fishermen not only serves as a means of conveying messages, but also reflects the motives, social background, and cultural values that live in the community, as follows. (Hudley et al., 2020).

The main purpose of using registers is to communicate efficiently, because the profession of fishermen whose workplace is at sea has verbal constraints if it is done. These obstacles include work at sea, loud diesel engine noise, and strong winds that can obscure verbal communication. The existence of this register reflects the form of adaptation of fishermen to the work environment. The use of language made with hand signals makes communication run efficiently.

In addition to its main function of communicating efficiently, registers also have a familiarity context. The familiarity that forms this collective identity becomes intimate. This nonverbal register is a code or tool of shared communication that is owned and understood by fishermen as intimacy in communicating and the purpose of using the language. This register also shows a typical communication system that has been formed collectively in the fishing community. This register is not understood by the public in general, except for people who work as fishermen in Purworejo village, Bonang district, Demak Regency (PBD).

In addition to a form of familiarization, this nonverbal register can also grow the distance between the speaker and the speaking partner. This happens in order to provide social distance from the *pandega* so that they have respect for the *juragan* or give the effect of giving respect and want to be told to the *juragan*. In this context, there is an example of the distance between the speaker and the speaking opponent using this nonverbal register. When P1 or the *juragan* uses a signal in sea conditions, such as a signal to change the propeller, while P2 or *pandega* immediately prepares the tools and materials before throwing themselves into the sea (if they are in the sea) or to the mouth of the river (if they have reached the pier) to change the propeller. *Pandega* at the research site is known as [*jura?*], which means subordinate, and [*juragan*] for a term that refers to the boss or owner of the boat. These are two concrete examples of social phenomena in the fishing community in the research village.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the fishermen community, especially in coastal areas such as Purworejo village, Bonang district, Demak regency (PBD), develops a distinctive communication system through the use of verbal and nonverbal registers as an adaptation to the working conditions at sea. The nonverbal registers found can be classified into three categories: fish species, fishing conditions, and fishing results, with the register referring to fish species being the most dominant due to the diversity of marine catches. The use of hand gestures serves as an effective communication strategy to overcome verbal limitations caused by engine noise, strong sea winds, and dynamic working situations.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, nonverbal registers function not only as practical communication tools but also play a role in building collective identity, strengthening social solidarity, and reflecting social hierarchy and power relations between boat owners (*juragan*) and crew members (*pandega*). These findings emphasize that language variation is strongly influenced by environmental, cultural, and social factors. They also highlight the important role of nonverbal communication in maintaining social cohesion and supporting effective workplace interaction.

The study shows that communication is not limited to spoken language but also involves gestures, expressions, and shared contextual understanding. These elements work together to strengthen relationships and ensure smooth coordination in daily activities. Future studies are encouraged to examine similar registers in other coastal communities. Further research can also explore the interaction between nonverbal communication, occupational culture, and technological change in maritime environments.

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Data Availability Statement: Data available on request from the authors. The data that support the findings of the research are available from the corresponding author, [**M.A.R.**], upon reasonable request. The reason

why readers should request this data is because the photographic data contains identifiable facial features of the fishermen and requires strict protection of their privacy. However, all image data has been included in this article.

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