

# Non Verbal Communication: A Potent Communication Tool

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## *Abstract*

Effective communication is very important in personal as well as professional life. Success in corporate life also depends on building a rapport with colleagues and being a team player. Words are important in communication but more important than words is the body language as bodies generally do not lie. Hence, to ascertain credibility of an individual, businessmen are on the lookout for the signals the bodies silently give. Shaking hands and trembling legs denote nervousness and lack of confidence, avoiding eye contact can mean guilt, nearness denotes affinity, time spent on a person or an activity denotes its importance. Animated movements, frowning face, furrowed brows, a happy smile, a vibrant voice and a firm handshake communicate a lot to the listeners than words. In this paper an attempt has been made to bring out the importance of non verbal communication by discussing Kinesics, Oculistics, Haptics, Proxemics, Object Language, Vocalics and Chronemics.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Communication is gift exercised by individuals to make relations and interact with people in a society. An individual has to undergo various experiences in life like love, encouragement, acceptance, rejection, inspiration, success, failure, depression, disappointment etc. These experiences give rise to a host of emotions like happiness, anger, hatred, jealousy, sadness, elation, etc. There are formal and informal relationships to be maintained and a person's interaction within these relationships give rise to a lot of emotions. While we are speaking our body is channeling these emotions in various ways i.e. if I have lost my job and am dejected it can be understood by looking at my face. It will be blank, cheerless with dim eyes. It is like; the light of my life has been taken away. On the other hand, if I have succeeded in an exam by coming first, the happiness is displayed on my face, there is a gleam in my eyes, my actions are animated, and my voice is encouraging as if the sun has lit my world. In communication, words are uttered by us but the body displays our emotions which cannot be manipulated by us unless we are actors or have been trained to do so. Our bodies do not lie and that is its beauty. If a person is guilty, he will not be able to look you in the eye. If he is not confident, he will stutter, or his hands and legs will shake. These manifestations of emotions are involuntary and give signals which if properly interpreted will display the real nature of the person. In business, where time and money both is important, people are trained to interpret the body language of a person in order to judge the true nature of the person before signing deals or contracts. Animals except the specialized use of sounds for communication use their body language. Primates cuddle their children, deer become still with their ears erect when they sense danger. Birds start flapping their wings and circling. All this is done to communicate the predicament they are in and to alert others of the danger.

The interest in non verbal communication as a means of communication is quite old. It was evident before spoken or written language. Primates used body language to communicate with one another. Body language developed because of the need for communication. To tell other members to stop, monkeys tend to make a

hard touch. Orangutans embrace one another (Puskar, 2019). Male gorillas to assert their supremacy will stand on their legs and beat their chest while they will bare their teeth to show aggression. Humans when they become aggressive will glare and scowl and use their middle finger. Blind people also use facial expression and gestures irrespective of their audience (blind or sighted people). It is believed that the Greeks and Romans were interested in body language because of their interest in human physiology and behavior (Patel, 2014). Francis Bacon (1806) opined that one's body displayed the intentions of one's mind.

In modern times non verbal communication has gained a lot of attention and its importance cannot be neglected. Section 2 gives the definition of body language, section 3 mentions the types, section 4 deals with the importance and section 5 gives the conclusion.

## 2.0 Non Verbal Communication and its Importance

Communication is exchange of information between two or more people. We communicate using language but a great deal of our communication is through gestures, postures, facial expression or even silence. Non verbal communication refers to the communication that does not involve words. It is the transmission of messages other than speech or writing that can be intentional or unintentional. These messages are difficult to interpret but have a great impact on the receivers and should not be ignored but understood with accuracy to the extent possible (Raman and Singh, 2006). It is also known as silent language.

Non verbal communication speaks louder than words e.g. posture, gestures, eye contact, touch, proximity etc. influence the way, the message is interpreted by the partners in a communication process. The sudden silence in the movie hall indicates that the movie is about to begin. Raised eyebrows during a conversation, conveys doubt or disbelief. Roar of applause signifies appreciation. This shows that we communicate not only through words but means other than words. A frowning face, furrowed brows, a happy smile, vibrant voice, animated movements and a firm handshake communicate a lot to the listeners, though words are not uttered (Raman and Singh, 2006).

You cannot fake your emotions all the time as body language is not under your control. You could welcome a person whom you do not approve with a broad smile once but it cannot happen always. Robins, (2018) feels that Non verbal communication reinforces verbal communication, substitutes verbal communication and sometimes contradicts verbal communication.

## 3.0 Types of Non Verbal Communication

Communication other than done through speech or writing can be categorized in the following manner:

### 1. Kinesics

Articulation or movement of the body while speaking is known as kinesics. It includes facial expression, posture and gestures (Raman and Singh, 2006).

#### a. Facial Expression

Facial expressions are extremely important. A smiling face has a different impact than a sullen face. A boss's smile makes you happy but a mother-in-law's frown certainly makes you sad. Researchers according to Anderson (1999) have identified five groups of facial expressions – happiness, sadness, fear, anger and disgust. Raman and Singh (2006) have given five basic physical descriptions of facial expressions as shown below.

1. **Neutral** - it could be found in pleasure, mask, and respect, thoughtful and quiet attention.
2. **Relaxed** - could result in love, pleasure and submission.
3. **Tense** - could result in fear, surprise, determination, contempt and extreme interest.
4. **Uplifted** - could result in happiness, anxiety, rage, love, astonishment and attention.
5. **Droopy** - found in distress, suffering, grief, dismay and shock.

The main role of facial expressions is to express emotions aptly e.g. smiling, sneering, yawning, raising eyebrows etc. They supplement the oral speech or sometimes contradict it doubting the credibility of speech. Sometimes it entirely replaces the oral message.

## b. Postures

Posture is the position of a speaker's body (Patel, 2014). Good posture gives positive feelings. An erect posture with a straight head indicates authoritativeness. A slumped posture indicates subordination or submissiveness. A head tilted to one side indicate friendliness as do open arms. Crossed legs and folded arms indicate a closed personality, very difficult to win over or get the job done. A forward leaning position indicates interest or remarks well received in the same manner pulling back means disinterested.

## c. Gestures

Gestures are our actions noted by others. Anderson (1999) describes three types of gestures – adaptors, emblems and illustrators.

- a. **Adaptors** – It is a touching behavior that expresses the inner state of a person like fidgeting with a pen or paper clips when nervous.
- b. **Emblems** – They have specific meanings like a raised thumb which means OK. A wave of the hand indicates goodbye.
- c. **Illustrators** – It makes the meaning clear like indicating the size of a box.

According to Raman and Singh (2006) gestures can be ambiguous or unambiguous. A person pointing to water and then pointing to his mouth indicates that he wants to drink water. This is an unambiguous gesture as there is no chance of misinterpretation. On the other hand nodding of the head may indicate agreement or disagreement.

One should not indulge in unnatural gestures like touching body parts as it hurts credibility. In general shaking hands and legs represent nervousness. Finger tapping and lip licking indicate lack of confidence. Open arms indicate friendliness and arms at the back, confidence.

## 2. Oculistics

The manner in which eyes are used during communication is termed as Oculistics. It may include eye contact or avoidance of eye contact according to Raman and Singh (2006). In an organization, office bearers or figures of authority can maintain a longer eye contact than their subordinates. A guilt free person can very easily look into your eyes and promote feelings of trust. A person who has committed a mistake or whose heart is guilty will not be able to look you in the eyes. A person avoiding eye contact signals that he is not interested in you. It fails to establish your credibility. Looking down can be associated with modesty or nervousness. Tiredness makes you roll your eyes up while tension makes you blink your eyes excessively.

Rizvi (2005) says, “our eyes are a mirror of our truest and innermost feelings” and hence eye contact should be maintained when listening to others or even while addressing them. Knowledge of cultural patterns will avoid misunderstandings.

### 3. Haptics

Haptics means communicating by touch. It forms an important form of communication in some primate species as it helps them form bonds and stay peaceful. Primates often hold and frequently cuddle and comfort their young (Raman and Singh, 2006). A pat on your back conveys more than words. It tells that someone is pleased with your performance which makes you feel good. You feel overjoyed when this pat is from someone who cares for you like your parent, teacher or friend. Heslin and Apler (1983) have divided touch into five types – functional- professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, love-intimacy and sexual arousal touch. Touch also gives the feeling of being loved and cared for. It shows that you are respected and appreciated. Touch binds you emotionally when expressed by a kiss or a hug. Touch also conveys feelings like warmth, comfort, motherliness and intimacy. It also speaks about your intentions. It becomes easier for someone to persuade you by patting on your shoulders.

### 4. Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of the effect of space and distance on communication. As the distance between two people decreases, the degree of intimacy increases. When people are attracted to someone they are close to them and when they lose communication it is termed that they are distant.

Personal space is your zone within which you feel comfortable. Hall (1968) has stated that scholars have identified four zones – public, social, personal and intimate.

- a. Public – Space 12 feet away from the body. Communication is formal.
  - b. Social – Space between 4 – 12 feet away from the body. Communication can be professional or casual.
  - c. Personal – Space between 1.5 – 4 feet away from the body. Zone reserved for friends and close acquaintances.
  - d. Intimate – Space within 1.5 feet from our body. Zone for closest friends, family or romantic partners.
- Personal space is a powerful concept. The person expressing anger is considered less threatening if he is far away but becomes more threatening if he is close.

According to Raman and Singh (2006) distance is also important. Being too close during interviews is termed pushy and one could lose credibility. If you stand far away you are termed as keeping the distance. The topic of conversation also depends on space. Secrets cannot be shared from a distance of 20 feet. The further the individual the less dominant the body language. Superiors in an organization enjoy better space than their subordinates

### 5. Personal Appearance or Object Language

Physical appearance also bears an important place in non verbal communication. According to Raman and Singh (2006) the first impression of a person is based on appearance. In general people are treated in the way they are dressed because it indicated their social status. Smart and well dressed people are treated royally than poorly dressed people. Appearance also counts. Attractive people are treated with respect as they are considered to be more credible, more likeable and persuasive.

People can change their personalities by changing their clothing, hairstyles and accessories. Clothing and other professionally related tools can give information about a person’s job, lifestyle and values

You can dress the way you want to create an impression. If you need cooperation, dress down when amongst your employees. Wear formals when appearing for an interview and for celebrations were ceremonial outfits.

## 6. Paralanguage - Vocalics

Paralanguage refers to all vocally produced sounds that are nonverbal parts of a message. According to Anderson (1999) paralanguage includes the vocal qualities like pitch, volume, rate, vocal quality, and verbal fillers. Raman and Singh (2006) have given the following features of paralanguage.

- a. Tone - is the quality of the sound that reveals the attitude of the speaker. Monotone or absence of intonation suggests negative state of mind.
- b. Inflection — voice inflection is the way we change the tone of our voice to emphasize on key words.
- c. Pitch - is a measure of how high or low a voice is. When we are angry the pitch is high. Pitch changes when talking from sports to violence.
- d. Intensity refers to loudness or softness. A person with a weak voice lacks confidence while a strong voice shows confidence.
- e. Articulation is utterance of the words and poor articulation occurs when sounds are omitted, substituted, distorted or plain slurred.
- f. Rhythm. Enables to express emotions while speaking.

When we speak our voice reveals our gender, age, geographic background, level of education, native birth emotional state etc.

## 7. Chronemics

Chronemics refers to how time affects communication. According to Raman and Singh (2006) it includes punctuality, amount of time spent with another and waiting time. Punctuality or coming on time shows your interest, sincerity and serious attitude towards work or the person. The amount of time spent on a task indicates how important it is. A business magnate by sharing his time is giving a clear message. A manager spending time with his employees on the shop floor shows he has regards for them.

## 8. Conclusion

Non verbal communication is a very powerful communication tool. Without speaking one can gauge the authentic messages that the body is sending and decide whether the person is genuine or not. The facial expressions indicate the mood of a person accordingly one can decide how to manage the person. Posture indicates a lot, whether the person is confident, authoritative, subordinate, and friendly or a hard nut to crack. Gestures lend emphasis to speech while eye contact establishes whether the person is guilty or not. Touch or hand movements form deep bonds of relationships, and manifests comfort and care. Space or closeness indicates the type of relation the person has with the other and can be tackled accordingly. The appearance of a person establishes the type of respect he/she deserves and the type of job one does. The tone, stress, articulation, pitch indicates the topic of discourse and the mode of discourse. Lastly time spent on a person or a subject indicates the sincerity and commitment of a person towards it.

The knowledge of non verbal communication goes a long way in establishing good long lasting relationships and gain cooperation. Hence it's a very important tool for communication.

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