



## **Contribution of Non Verbal Language in Communication: A Study of Non-Verbal Communication**

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**ABSTRACT:** Communication is a dynamic process with the interchanging components of sending and receiving information, ideas, emotions and the working of mind. Ever since the emergence of human race, we have always been engaged in various forms of communication, knowingly or unknowingly. There are two different kinds of communication, verbal and non-verbal. Non-verbal communication was very much used at the time when humans had not started conversing with each other. In the era of caveman just using nonverbal communication could help you to understand the other person, but in the complex society of today both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication are needed to fully understand each other. We are taught from a very young age the use and implication of both nonverbal and verbal communication. It is a well illustrated fact that nonverbal cues provide clarity or contradiction for a message we intend to send but nonverbal communication is not as easy to understand as it seems to be. Often it is misinterpreted and because of that wrong message is understood by the receiver. Another widely accepted fact states that by focusing upon the body language of a person we can predict how he/she feels about any situation. Body language is characterized in several different ways, such ways are Haptic, Kinesics, Polemics, and physical characteristics. This paper will focus mostly on the basic details of how to read and understand non verbal communication and what we can learn from it.

**Keywords:** Emotional Clusters, Types of body language, Haptics, Paralinguistic Features and Proxemics / Space Distance etc.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication is the exchange of our deep thoughts, ideas, emotions and the working of our mind with other fellow human being. This exchange of thoughts involves a very minute process which includes two respective roles: Receiver and Sender. This is further divided into a number of categories out of which Verbal and Non-Verbal forms of communication occupy a major portion. Verbal form of communication is that which includes spoken, oral, and unwritten way of communicating. It makes use of words, vocabulary, numbers, symbols and vocal elements and is organized in sentences. But even to skill this form of communication is not as easy as it appears and is not reserved for the selected few. It is an ability that each one of us should develop to improve relationships and interactions whether we are professionals or social units.

Now as it is evident that everyone's mind is always having some thoughts and these thoughts are primarily in the form of pictures and words. The way we are speaking the words affects your life as well as others. They have the power to create and ignite emotions and to motivate people to take the desired action. When we communicate clearly, we activate your mind and that of others as well.

On the other hand we create our reality with our senses, the eyes, ears and feelings etc and words and symbols are used to create the meanings. Here comes a theory propounded by *Jacques Derrida* in which he had laid the foundation of the concept of *Sign, Signifier and Signified*. Every word and object works as a sign which further generate an image in our sensory perception. This is why positive and uplifting spoken words motivate and inspire us whenever we are encouraged to read and watch informative materials, listen to motivational audio programs and attend classes or seminars that are related to our line of work or objectives.

Nonverbal communication, or body language, is an integrated and vital form of communication. According to *John Borg*, “human communication consists of 93 percent body language and paralinguistic cues, while only 7% of communication consists of words themselves<sup>1</sup>”. When we interact with other people, we are always giving and receiving a number of wordless signals. All of our nonverbal behaviors like the gestures we make, the way we sit, how fast or how loud we talk, how close we stand, how much eye contact we make and how our face change its expressions, send strong messages of our personality. The way we listen, look, move, and react gives signal to the other person whether or not well we are listening attentively. The nonverbal signals that we send either produce a sense of interest, trust, and desire for connection—or they generate disinterest, distrust, and confusion.

*Barun K. Mitra* in his book “Personality Development and Soft Skills” has given a very apt example to further explain the implication of body language<sup>2</sup>. *Mona Lisa* is popularly known in Europe as *La Gioconda*. There is no better example of body language and its many interpretations of her personality around the world, than the enigmatic smile of this classic creation of *Leonardo da Vinci*. Her smile speaks a thousand words, indicates her mental disposition and expresses her inner self. To interpret her fine emotions, we need to look not just at her smile, but also at her eyes and her facial expressions. Her smile is perplexing and mysterious. Is she happy or is she sad?

The viewer of the picture can spend hours and days interpreting her, and getting deeply involved, as if he is the creator. This is the most differentiating aspect of *Mona Lisa*—she actually *involves* the viewer in an unparalleled manner. The signals sent by *Mona Lisa*’s expressions are indicative of the powerful signals sent out through every person’s body language. They bring out the key message: *We communicate the most when we are not speaking*<sup>3</sup>.

Body language is important because it reflects a person’s emotions. Emotions can span the entire spectrum from aggressive and power, to submission and relaxation. Therefore it is important to realize that more than a particular part of our body signaling certain emotions; it is this *combination of all our non-verbal actions* that cumulatively reflect the state of mind.

#### **EMOTIONAL CLUSTERS REFLECTED THROUGH BODY LANGUAGE:**

- 1. Aggressive:** This is a body language that is not easy to display, yet is very important. Aggressive gestures first show up through tightened jaws, stiff facial muscles, a somber face and straight staring eyes. Aggression develops over time, and shows itself in various ways. These include thumping the table with tight fists to make a point, raised voice, animated gestures with overuse of arms and fingers—and sometimes of the whole body.
- 2. Submissive:** Submissive body language is easy to recognize. The person holds his head down, closes his body parts towards himself and nods his head in agreement much more frequently than desired. He keeps his chin down (and sometimes has his hands on his chin), as if submitting himself while listening to the other person’s views. He also keeps his palm open—again to indicate this openness.
- 3. Attentive:** This is an important body language both in the corporate world and in the academia. It includes the level of genuine interest of the listener. Attentive body language includes: gazing of the eyes towards the speaker, mild nods of heads at periodic intervals, saying ‘hmmm’, ‘yes’, ‘is it so’, at appropriate points or switching off the mobile phone or ensuring that he is not going to be disturbed. These actions are powerful signals that show undivided attention of the listener.
- 4. Nervous:** This body language is important to avoid, especially in interviews and presentations. The first sign of nervousness is having a dry throat, resulting in frequent (visible) swallowing of the saliva. Lack of confidence also gets reflected in unsteady voice (Often accompanied by a stammer), avoiding eye contact, and head bent down.
- 5. Upset:** How does one understand that a person is upset through his body language? Some body language signals to look out for, to identify ‘upset’ signals are: tightened jaws, deliberate frown on the forehead, taking off the reading glasses, eyes closed occasionally, avoiding eye contact with others or unstable or losing control over emotions (e.g., voice shaking, out-of-control gestures).

6. **Bored:** Getting bored is noticed by the gestures like prolonged or frequent yawns or eyes shut for a duration etc. Bored people usually look everywhere other than at the speaker. They frequently look at their watch or mobile. They give blank stares when their eyes are open. Bored people also distract the speaker (and the audience). They converse on unrelated topics or criticize the speaker privately.
7. **Relaxed:** Being relaxed is an important gesture, especially in difficult and testing circumstances. Typical body language that shows a person's relaxed frame of mind are: head straight, chest upright and balanced body, no folds or frown on the forehead, easy and quite breathing, gentle smile on face and calm eyes. A relaxed person is easy to have a mature conversation with. He thinks through before reacting.
8. **Power:** Power may be displayed in two distinct ways-- explicit or subtle. An explicit show of power is usually not respected by colleagues or subordinates. It indicates lack of humility. On the other hand, subtle show of power is more professionally acceptable. Some common body language gestures that indicate power are sitting at the head of a table, standing/sitting from an elevated platform, thumping fist on the table, or accompanied by key aides at all times etc. People who display this body language clearly enjoy doing so. However, it is important that they do so carefully, since over-use of this body language may lead to losing respect of others over time.
9. **Defensive:** A person under attack immediately assumes a defensive posture. Typical body language gestures associated with a defensive posture are: tightly folded arms, crossed legs, sitting on a reverse chair or showing nervousness while giving excuses etc. A defensive posture is usually assumed by people when they are being attacked verbally by the aggressor through sharp public or private criticism.

Let us now discuss two types of body language and their interpretations that are most commonly encountered in our everyday life—*Handshake and Eyes*.

➤ **Handshake - The Most Common Body Language:** Handshake is the most common body language. It is a very powerful body language that emanates important signals. The following table mentions different types of handshakes and the corresponding messages.

**Table 1: Handshakes and their messages**

Handshake Type	Body Language interpretation
Warm	A comfortable handshake, with a light grip that maximizes the surface of palm and finger contact with the other person. It is prolonged and usually accompanied by long eye contact.
Unknown	A short-duration handshake with a stranger or a one-time acquaintance has no emotional content. The grip indicates lack of interest. There is no more than a cursory eye contact or a short-lived tinge smile accompanying this handshake.
Adversary	A tight-gripped, short-duration, jerky handshake signals that they do not trust each other. There is at best a cold smile during this process. A variant of this type is the 'power handshake'. Here one party or both want to send a strong signal to the other that they are superior and more powerful.
Formal	This is seen in professional settings when colleagues from the same company or profession meet. The moderateness of grip and finger position indicates a trusting and professional relationship, yet one that does not get personal.

➤ **Eyes - A Powerful Reflection of One's Inner Self:** Eyes are possibly the most powerful as part of body language. It is powerful because it sends out the first and most important signal about one's inner self.

Now body language signaled through the eye is critical in professional situations. During presentations to the audience, a poor speaker is often fixated on one person or a small cluster of people. He doesn't vary his eye contact through the entire distance of the room, and from left to right. On other hand, a good speaker does exactly the reverse, and gets attention from the audience at large.

During interviews, maintaining eye contact with the interviewer is very important. Lack of eye contact during interviews indicates lack of self-confidence. Similarly, maintaining proper eye contact is also very important during performance discussion sessions between a supervisor and his subordinates.

### **TYPES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND BODY LANGUAGE:**

There are many different types of nonverbal communication. Together, the following nonverbal signals and cues communicate your interest and investment in others.

**1. Personal Appearance:** A person's external appearance is as important as the exterior of a house. As a fact, we will never be impressed with a house or its people if you found the exterior of a house shabby. Similarly, a speaker who does not seem to be maintaining himself/herself well is not likely to win the appreciation of the audience<sup>4</sup>. In the professional world nothing happens by chance. Professionals make their own choices. Therefore, if the choices go wrong, one cannot expect the right results. For example, if you choose to wear a rumpled dress on the day you are being interviewed, it is sure to spoil your chances of landing into the job. But being properly dressed does not mean being fashionably or glamorously dressed. It is something you have to cultivate, because if you dress sloppily in your everyday life and then one fine day decides to dress properly, then chances are that you won't succeed.

**2. Posture:** Postures refers to the way we sit, stand, and carry ourselves. Our posture communicates the way we visualize the world around us. For instance, what do you think of a person who keeps his/her head down while walking? Do they exude confidence and ease? Certainly not. Most of them actually seem to be scared of being noticed. Some other appears to be lost in deep thought and contemplation. Such people are either mocked at or ignored. Therefore, a professional has to cultivate and maintain elegance in his/her sitting, standing, and walking posture<sup>5</sup>.

Here are some practical tips, following which you can maintain an impressive posture during professional meetings, interviews, group discussions, presentations, and other formal occasions:

- a) Look straight while walking; avoid looking down at the floor, outside the window or door, or up the ceiling.
- b) Don't let your shoulder droop.
- c) Lift your feet clearly off the floor while walking; avoid dragging them.
- d) Don't sit on the edge of the chair; it communicates unease and discomfort.
- e) Avoid crossing your legs while sitting or standing before your audience.
- f) Keep one foot ahead of the other; this helps you feel and appear at ease.

**3. Gestures and Hand Movements:** Just as a picture can easily speak a thousand words: a gesture can communicate all that the speaker feels, consciously or unconsciously. A speaker or listener's gestures and hand movements can support and emphasize their state of mind. Imagine a speaker who keeps rubbing his/her palms while delivering a speech; imagine a listener who sits cross-legged and also clamps his/her arms against the chest. What do you make of them? Do these people create a favorable impression on others? Certainly, they don't<sup>6</sup>.

It is so because, though the gestures do not overtly convey anything, but the impact created by them is telling enough. Given below some important tips which should be borne in mind while using gestures and other hand movements:

- a) Keep your hands in control; don't let them have a life of their own.
- b) Use graceful and socially acceptable gestures.
- c) Avoid aggressive and provoking gestures.
- d) Don't keep your arms folded against your chest; it suggests evasion and fear.
- e) Don't keep your hands locked behind you; it suggests concealment of your true personality.

- f) Avoid keeping your hands in your pockets; it suggests that you are hiding something from others.
- g) Avoid playing with key rings, etc.; it distracts your listeners.
- h) Don't wring your hands or play with rings on your fingers.

**4. Eye Contact:** Eyes are the window to the soul. They truthfully convey the emotions and feeling one goes through. In fact, it is believed that you can tell lies with words but your eyes will give away the truth. Therefore, looking into a person's eye is the best way to understand his/her attitude or reaction to all that you speak.

In fact, in any human discourse, eyes play a very significant role, and avoiding eye contact is seen as an indication of evasion, fear, doubt, inadequacy, and confusion. Expressing any of these emotions is equal to digging one's own grave. Therefore, regardless of your position in any human interaction, learn to look into the eyes of your co-communicators. Eye contact is also important in maintaining the flow of conversation and for gauging the other person's response. . Eye contact modifies the meaning of other nonverbal behaviors. For example, people on elevators or crowds can adjust their sense of personal space if they agree to limit eye contact. What happens if this convention isn't followed<sup>7</sup>?

**5. Facial Expressions:** Just as eyes are regarded as the windows to the soul, the face is considered as an index of our mind. In the entire communication process, it is the person's face that we get to see most of time. Therefore, if a face reflects negativity of any type and expresses dejection, irritation, fear, or doubt, it is likely to affect the effectiveness of communication.

Since our face gives an indication of what we experience while communicating with others, it is of great significance to all the people involved in the process of communication. Therefore, we should use our face for expressing our confidence and ease. Start with a smile; a smile can light up our face. You may have noticed that speakers who spoke to you with a smile on their faces were well accepted and better listened to. Given below are some tips which may help you maintain proper facial expressions while speaking or listening to others:

- a) Start with a smile but don't keep smiling throughout.
- b) Don't have a frown on your face; it suggests arrogance.
- c) Avoid raising your eyebrows while speaking or listening to others.
- d) Don't purse your lips while speaking; it reveals your lack of confidence.
- e) Avoid expressing dejection, sadness, or indifference.
- f) Let your face suggest a willingness to associate yourself with others.
- g) Don't let your face to express any kind of disrespect or contempt for your listeners.

**6. Paralinguistic Features:** Now just as we can communicate various attitudes through our gestures, posture, expressions, and body movements, eyes, and hands, we can express emotions and feelings with the help of different aspects of our voice. Though we cannot radically change our voice, there are different aspects of voice which can be carefully worked on to create the right type of impact on our listeners while we deliver a speech, make a presentation, participate in a group discussion, or appear for a job interview.

**6.1 Rate:** Rate refers to the number of words we utter per minute. Speaking too fast is related to lack of comfort. A speaker who does not feel sure of himself/herself generally feels intimidated by the challenges of speaking in professional situations. This leads to a feeling of nervousness, and the best solution seems to speak as fast as one can and be finished with the frightening prospect of standing in front of the audience.

Now the question arises: How does one understand what a slow or fast rate is? Studies in this regard suggest that a rate between 125 and 150 words per minute is ideal in professional situations. However, if the matter needs deep thought and meditative attention, the rate is generally a little slower. Similarly, when we have to share something in an exciting or casual way, the rate of delivery can accelerate.

**6.2 Pauses:** The most crucial thing about pause is their timing. A rightly times pause is as important as a rightly placed word. Therefore, whenever you pause, pause at the conclusion of a certain

thought unit and not in between. Remember, a rightly timed pause adds to the value of what you say and a wrongly placed pause distracts the audience.

Similarly vocalized pauses such as sounds like ‘umm..’, ‘err..’, ‘aa..’, etc truly spoil the impact of being effective. There is no apparent justification for vocalizing our pauses, except for the fact that it suggests our laziness and lack of preparedness on our part. Similar to vocalized pauses, is the overuse of repetitive expressions. Many a time, we use expressions such as ‘you know’, ‘I mean’, ‘actually’, ‘in fact’, ‘okay...’, ‘well’, or ‘right’. Using an expression once in a while is not distracting, but when we start putting up a string of such expressions, it surely distracts the audience.

**6.3 Volume:** A speaker’s volume often decides how he/she is likely to be received by the audience. The speaker who speaks at a low volume is likely to be seen as someone who lacks confidence, whereas a speaker whose volume is too high suggests his/her boorishness. Now the question arises: How do we understand whether the volume we maintain is adequate or not? In order to understand this, we should observe the reactions of audience while we speak. If there is any smirking or mocking expressions on the faces of audience sitting in couple of front rows, we should understand that we are too loud. On the other hand, if the same audience in the last rows cranes their necks and their faces giving confused expressions, it means that we are not audible enough.

**6.3 Pitch/Intonation/Cadence/Voice Modulation:** Pitch refers to the rise and fall in human voice. Pitch plays a crucial role in communicating our ideas to others. In fact, it is the pitch—the rise and fall—in our voice which can express all emotions that are to be conveyed. Therefore it is very important for us to carefully employ the desired pitch patterns. Quite often, we find the speech of a person quite boring because he/she does not use the variety of pitch patterns as per the requirement of the situation. In order to understand this, a practical solution is to listen to those songs in which the singer keeps singing in a solemn way until he/she reaches the crescendo. The change in the initial note and the later part is the change in the pitch pattern. The change and variety of pitch patterns could further be understood by listening to the song at the same volume.

**7. Proxemics/Space Distance:** While communicating in formal situations, it becomes quite important for us to understand and respect the territories of other professionals, and see to it that they never feel intruded. Therefore it becomes very important for us to understand the different zones into which the psychological territories of human beings can be divided. Various psychological zones maintained by most of us are given below.

**7.1 Intimate Zone:** No stranger is welcome into the intimate zone which is shared only by spouses, lovers, children, parents, and very close relatives and friends. Anyone who tries to enter someone’s intimate zone in professional situations is more likely to seem like an intruder.

**7.2 Personal Zone:** Watch carefully the distance maintained by people while they interact with one another during business gatherings, social functions, parties, and other friendly get-togethers. This distance varies from a couple of inches to a couple of feet and is indicative of the warmth or the necessity to maintain formality in relations.

**7.3 Social Zone:** The distance maintained between a couple of feet to several feet is suggestive of the social zone that we maintain while interacting with strangers or occasional visitors such as laundry persons, gardeners, plumbers, electricians, etc. In professional gatherings, people sometimes are seen maintaining this distance.

**7.4 Public Zone:** Public zone is most commonly maintained by the speakers and their audience. Consequently, we find a defined area from where the speaker has to address his/her listeners. Though a distance of some feet is usually maintained between the both while they share a public zone, the actual distance maintained differs from culture to culture. Therefore, it is important for us to understand and appreciate such cultural variations and requirements, and adjust the distance between us and our listeners accordingly.

**Table 2: Zones and Distances maintained within different zones**

Zones	Distances
Intimate Zone	15-46 cm
Personal Zone	46 cm-1.2 m
Social Zone	1.2 m-3.6 m
Public Zone	Over 3.6 m

Source: Pease, Allan and Barbara Pease, *The definitive Book of Body Language*, Manjul Publishing House, Bhopal, 2004, p.195.

**8. Haptics:** Similarly it is also very important to understand the subtleties of Haptics, which in many situations is limited to handshakes or occasional hugging and patting. Of course, a handshake is a very common etiquette that people in almost all situations seem to observe. In some of the formal situations, we see the heads of states, such as the prime minister of two countries, shaking hands with their counterpart. In such situations, a handshake generally signals the sealing of a contract or agreement. Besides this, a handshake among professionals is regarded as a sign of the warmth that is required to be communicated in almost all human interactions. At times, some nervousness is seen on the face of youngsters who are offered a handshake by their senior officers or boss. Many of us tend to put our hands together to form a *namaste*. **8.** But it should always be remembered that before extending a hand for a handshake it is required that we should analyze the situation and assess whether extending a hand is appropriate or not. However, whenever you shake hands with others, let it be a firm handshake and not a clammy and limp one. Always let your Haptic too suggest your zeal and enthusiasm while dealing with others in professional situations.

### CONCLUSION

Non verbal communication is not only crucial in a plain daily communication; it is also equally important for interpreter. Non-verbal communication can take various forms, each of which illustrates or substitute a certain part of the verbal communication. It includes many more elements than one might think at first. Whether non-verbal communication supports the interpreters in their task or presents a difficulty, it will always play an important role.

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