

LECTURE 8: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Learning Outcomes



After reading these notes you should be able to:

1. Understand the characteristics of nonverbal communication
2. Differentiate between verbal and nonverbal communication
3. Analyze functions that nonverbal communication serves
4. Apply types of nonverbal communication.

DEFINITION:

Nonverbal communication is oral and non-oral messages expressed by other than linguistic means. This rules out not only sign languages but also written words as well, but it includes messages transmitted by vocal means that do not involve language such as sighs, laughs and other utterances.

Characteristics of nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication exists

Without understanding speech it is possible to get an idea about how others are feeling. Without any formal experience one is able to recognize and to some degree interpret messages that others people sent nonverbally. The fact that you and everyone around you is constantly sending nonverbal clues is important because it means that you have a **constant** source of information available about yourself and others.

Nonverbal Behaviour Has Communicative Value

Whether or not our non-verbal behavior is intention others recognize it and take it into account when responding to us. Although non-verbal behavior reveals information we aren't always conscious of what we are communicating non-verbally.

Nonverbal communication is primarily relational

Nonverbal communication is much better suited to expressing attitudes and feelings than ideas. It offers many cues about the way people feel; often more than we get from their words alone.

Nonverbal communication allows us to define the kind of relationships we want to have with others. You could appreciate this fact by thinking about the wide range of ways you could behave when greeting another person. You could wave, shake hands, nod, smile, clap the other person on the back, give a hug or avoid contact.

Each one of these decisions would send a message about the nature of your relationship with the other person. Non-verbal messages also convey emotions that we may be unwilling or unable to express or ones we may not ever be aware of.

In fact non-verbal communication is much better suited to expressing attitudes and feelings than to conveying ideas. For example how would you express yourself non-verbally when?

- You are bored
- You are attracted to another person in a group
- You are nervous about trying an experiment.
- Researchers suggest that one important element of communicative competence is non-verbal expressiveness.

Nonverbal communication is ambiguous in real life nonverbal expressions are so ambiguous that observers are unable to identify the emotions they convey with accuracy and better than blind guessing.

Non verbal behavior is just as ambiguous in everyday life but some are easier to decode accurately than others. In laboratory experiments subjects are better at identifying positive facial expressions such as love happiness surprise and interest than negative ones like fear, sadness, anger and disgust. But in real life however, spontaneous non-verbal expressions are so ambiguous that observers are unable to identify the emotions they convey with accuracy any better than that of blind guessing.

When trying to make sense of ambiguous non-verbal behavior you need to consider several factors:

- The context in which it occurs e.g. smiling at a joke suggests a different feeling from what is suggested by smiling at another 's misfortune
- The history of our relationship with the sender (friendly hostile etc)
- The other's mood at the time.
- Your feelings at the time (when you are feeling insecure almost anything can seem like a threat)
- The important idea is that when you become aware of non-verbal messages you should think of them not as facts but as clues to be checked.

Much nonverbal communication is culture- bound. Cultures have different nonverbal as well as verbal ones. The meaning of some gestures varies from one culture to another. Despite differences much nonverbal behaviour are universal. The meaning of some gestures varies from one culture to another e.g. The 'okay' gesture made by joining thumb and fore finger to form a circle is a cheery affirmation to most Americans but has less positive meanings in other parts of the world, for example, in France it means 'you are worth zero' in Greece and Turkey it is a vulgar sexual invitation its meant as an insult and a visiting tourist can easily get in trouble in a particular culture.

Less obvious cross-cultural differences can damage relationships without the parties even recognizing exactly what has gone wrong.

Pattern of eye contact vary around the world for example A direct gaze is considered appropriate for speakers in Latin America, Arab world and southern Europe and on the other hand Asians, Indians and Northern Europeans gaze at a listener peripherally or not at all. In either case deviations from the norm are likely to make a listener uncomfortable.

Differences between verbal and nonverbal communication

Single Vs. Channels most verbal messages- words, sentences, and paragraphs- reach us one at a time. Unlike the spoken word, however, non verbal messages don't arrive

in such an orderly, sequential manner. Instead, they bombard us simultaneously from a multitude of channels.

Discrete Vs. Continuous verbal messages- words, sentences, and paragraphs-form messages with clear beginnings and endings. In this sense, it is possible to say that someone either is or is not communicating verbally by seeing whether or not he or she is speaking or writing. Unlike spoken or written words, however, nonverbal communication is continuous and never ending. Postures, gestures and other nonverbal cues take place simultaneously.

Conscious Vs. Unconscious We usually think about what we want to say before speaking or writing, however, most nonverbal messages are not deliberate. Of course we pay attention to some of our nonverbal behavior like smiling. But there are so many nonverbal channel that it is impossible to think about and control all of them. For example our slumping shoulders might contradict our smiles, and our sweating palms might cancel out all the self- confidence of our firm handshakes.

Clear Vs. Ambiguous Although sometimes verbal communication can be confusing, most of nonverbal cues are even more vague, but they are not completely ambiguous for example frown signifies some sort of negative emotion and smile indicates a positive one. We need language to tell us why others feel as they do for example “ is the boss smiling because she likes your ideas or because she finds it amusing but completely impractical?” the best way to find out is to ask for a verbal clarification, and not to depend on our own reading of the verbal cues.

Functions of nonverbal communication

Repeating one can give a direction first verbally the repeat their instructions by pointing towards the direction. Pointing is an example of an emblem- deliberate nonverbal behaviour that has precise meanings known to everyone within a cultural group

Substituting emblems can also replace a verbal message; nonverbal substituting is especially when people are reluctant to express their feelings in words.

Complementing sometimes nonverbal behaviours match the content of a verbal message. Much complementing behaviour consists of illustrators- nonverbal behaviours that accompany and support spoken words. Scratching the head when

searching for an idea and snapping your fingers when it occurs are examples of illustrators that complement verbal messages.

Accenting just as we use italics to highlight an idea in print, we use nonverbal devices to emphasize oral messages. Stressing certain words with the voice is another way to add nonverbal accents.

Regulating nonverbal behaviours can control the flow of verbal communication. For example, parties in conversation often unconsciously send and receive turn taking cues.

Contradicting people often simultaneously express different and even contradictory messages in their verbal and nonverbal behaviours.

Types of nonverbal communication

Posture and gesture kinesics is the study of body movements, gesture and posture. Relaxed postures happen in non-threatening situations and we tighten up when threatened. Sometimes gestures are intentional-emblems like a cheery wave or thumbs up.

This is our movements, sitting, standing and body position, and they illustrate the communication power of *kinesics*, the study of body movement, gesture and posture.

Posture is a rich channel for conveying nonverbal information. It can communicate vulnerability in situation far more serious than mere social or business settings.

Gestures are a fundamental element of communication. People who have been blind from birth use them. Movements in which one part of the body grooms, massages, rubs, pinches, picks or otherwise manipulates another body part. Social scientists call these *manipulators*. Research confirms what common sense suggests that increased use of manipulators is often a sign of discomfort, but not all signals uneasiness.

Face and eyes are probably the most noticed parts of the body, but this does not mean that their nonverbal messages are the easiest to read. It is hard even to describe the number and kinds of expressions we commonly produce with our face and eyes.

The face and eyes are probably the most noticed parts of the body, and their impact is powerful for example, smiling cocktail waitresses earn larger tips more than unsmiling ones. The influence of facial expressions and eye contact doesn't mean that their

nonverbal messages are always easy to read. The face is a tremendously complicated channel of expression for several reasons. One is the number of expressions people can produce. Another is the speed with which they can change. Different emotions show most clearly in different part of the face: happiness and surprise in the eyes and lower face.

It is easy to imagine how someone would look who is fearful and surprised or disgusted and angry. The eyes themselves can send several kinds of messages. Someone's glance with your eyes is usually a sign of involvement whereas looking away signals a desire to avoid contact.

Voice itself is another form of nonverbal communication. **Paralanguage** is a term used to describe nonverbal, vocal messages. Vocal changes that contradict spoken words are not easy to conceal. If the speaker is trying to conceal fear or anger, the voice will probably sound higher and louder, and the rate of talking may be faster than normal.

The social scientists use the term paralanguage to describe nonverbal, vocal messages. Through its tone, speed, pitch, volume, number and length of pauses, and *disfluencies* (such as stammering, use of 'uh,' 'um', 'er' and so on) all these factors can do a great deal to reinforce or contradict the message our words convey. Sarcasm is one instance in which both emphasis and tone of voice help change a statement's meaning.

Researchers have identified the communicative value of paralanguage through the use of content-free speech. The impact of paralinguistic cues is strong. The listeners judge the speaker's intention from the paralanguage, not from the words themselves. Paralanguage can affect behavior in many ways, some of which are rather surprising. Vocal changes that contradict spoken words are not easy to conceal.

Besides reinforcing or contradicting messages, some vocal factors influence the way a speaker is perceived by others. For example, those who speak loudly and without hesitations are viewed as more confident than those who pause and speak quietly.

Touch is essential to our healthy development. Researchers have catalogued twelve different kinds of touches, including "positive," "playful," "control" and "ritualistic" some types of touch indicate varying degrees of aggression. Others signify types of relationships. Besides being the earliest means we have of making contact with others,

touching is essential to our healthy development. It also plays a large part of how we relate to others and the environment. It increases self-disclosure, verbalization of psychiatric patients, and the preference children have for their counselors. It also increases compliance.

Touch can communicate many messages and others signify types of relationships:

- Functional/ professional (dental examination, haircut)
- Social/ polite (handshake)
- Friendship/ warmth (clap on back, Spanish abrazo)
- Love/ intimacy (some caresses, hugs)
- Sexual arousal (some kisses, strokes)

Clothing besides protecting us from the elements, clothing is a means of nonverbal communication. One writer has suggested that clothing may convey at least ten types of messages to others: Economic level, Educational level, trustworthiness, social position, level of sophistication, economic background, social background, educational background, level of success and moral character

Distance proxemics is the study of the way people and animals use space. We choose a particular distance depending on how we feel towards the other person at a given time, the context of the conversation, and our personal goals. As a result we have intimate distance, personal distance, social distance and public distance.

- Morphologist Edward T. Hall says that we choose a particular distance depending on how we feel toward the other person at a given time the context of our conversation and our personal goal.

- E. T. Hall defines four distances used in mainstream North American culture.

- i. Intimate distance – from skin contact to about 18 inches. The most obvious context for this is during interaction with people whom we are emotionally close. Also in receiving services e.g. medical and beauty services and in some sports. We trust the people that we allow into this distance.

- ii. Personal distance – 18 inches to 4 ft. This occurs between e.g. relational partners in public. We are uncomfortable when someone moves into this distance without invitation. At ‘arm’s length’, we hold personal interaction but less personal than at closer distance.
- iii. Social distance – 4 ft to 12 ft. This occurs in business situations such as between sales people and customers, between colleagues at work or junior staff sitting away from the boss.
- iv. Public distance – 12 ft and above. This is the furthest distance. Two-way communication becomes difficult. The distance is necessary owing to the size of the audience. We assume that a person who chooses this when he could have used a shorter distance is not intending dialogue.

Choosing optimal distance can have a powerful effect on how we regard others and how we respond to them.

Time social scientists use the term *chronemics* to describe the study of human beings use and structure time. The use of time depends greatly on culture. In some cultures, punctuality is critically important, while in others it is barely considered.

Territoriality the way people use space can communicate a good deal about power and status relationships. Generally we grant people with higher status more personal territory and greater privacy. Whereas personal space is the invisible bubble we carry around as an extension of our physical being, territory is a fixed space.

Environment designing an environment can shape communication that takes place in it. A research study indicates that the impression that home designs communicate can be remarkably accurate. The decoration schemes communicate accurate information about the home owners’ intellectualism, politeness, maturity, and optimism, and tenseness, willingness to take adventures, family orientations, and reservedness. There are environments for workers, physicians, children, adults etc. Designs also express economic status, social status etc. The way we use an existing environment communicates our feeling about it.

Physical attractiveness: most people claim that looks aren't the best measure of desirability or character, but they typically prefer others who they find attractive. For example, women who are perceived as attractive have more dates, receive higher grades in college, persuade males with greater ease, and receive lighter court sentences. Both men and women whom others view as attractive are rated as being more sensitive, kind, strong, sociable, and interesting than their less fortunate brothers and sisters. For example in the US short people have difficulty finding jobs and men over six-foot-two receive starting salaries than average 12.4 percent higher than comparable applicants under six feet.

Summary



Nonverbal communication consists of messages expressed by nonlinguistic means. Thus, it is inaccurate to say that all wordless expressions are nonverbal or that all spoken statement is totally verbal.

Nonverbal communication consists of messages expressed by nonlinguistic means. There are nonverbal dimensions to all spoken language, and there are sign languages that are not spoken.

Nonverbal behavior is an integral part of virtually all communication, and nonverbal skill is a positive predictor of relational success. There are several important characteristics of nonverbal communication. First is the simple fact that it exists—that communication occurs even in the absence of language. This leads to the second characteristic: It is impossible not to communicate nonverbally; humans constantly send messages about themselves that are available for others to receive. The third characteristic is that nonverbal communication is ambiguous; there are many possible interpretations for any behavior. This ambiguity makes it important for the receiver to verify any interpretation before jumping to conclusions about the meaning of a nonverbal message. Finally, nonverbal communication is different from verbal communication in complexity, flow, clarity, impact, and intentionality.

Some nonverbal communication is influenced by culture and gender. While there are some universal expressions, even the manner in which these expressions are used reflects the communicator's culture and gender.

And behaviors that have special meanings in one culture may express different messages in another. We stated that nonverbal communication serves many functions: repeating, substituting, complementing, accenting, regulating, and contradicting verbal behavior, as well as deceiving.

The remainder of this chapter introduced the many ways in which humans communicate

nonverbally: through posture, gesture, use of the face and eyes, voice, touch, clothing, distance, time, territoriality, and physical environment.

Activity



Read the notes and identify areas that apply to you. Enjoy the reading there is no assignment this week as we are busy working on our graduation scheduled for this Friday.

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