

THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS

ADELA- SUZANA COLȚA
TIBISCUS UNIVERSITY TIMISOARA, 1A DALIEI STREET
suzy_adela@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Non-verbal communication consists of all the messages other than words that are used in communication. In oral communication, these symbolic messages are transferred by means of intonation, tone of voice, vocally produced noises, body posture, body gestures, facial expressions or pauses. Almost 90% of our communication contains non-verbal elements.

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To have a successful business and to create your successful interpersonal relationships body language is essential, because many times we do not express in words exactly what we feel. But our bodies forward what we feel and so clearly reveal the secret of our thoughts or our feelings that can be "read", decoded by those around us and may be used against us. Therefore, very often, it is pointed out the importance of deciphering nonverbal communication, especially in the business area. Any extra information, no matter how small it is, even a firm handshake, not watching in the eye, rubbing pen, a ring or a watch (often involuntary actions), describe accurately what is the interior "struggle" or emotions of the person in front of us.

The business environment is a very difficult one that is why it's important to gain an advantage by any means. The solution that is at hand for everyone is learning how to interpret the most important elements of non-verbal communication.

Types of gestures

After the American specialists Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen and Joseph C. Hagar¹ there are five types of gestures:

- a) *Emblems*** - OK gesture, there are some non-verbal elements whose meaning is known by most members of social group and are used intentionally to convey certain messages,
- b) *Illustrative*** - when we want to show that an object is round and describe a circle by hand, as those nonverbal elements that accompany and complete verbal messages
- c) *Facial expressions*** - which express our emotional states,
- d) *Adjusting gestures*** - they are used when we nod our head, when we direct the eyes towards the people we are communicating with, they help us in maintaining and controlling interaction with interlocutors

¹ Ekman Paul, Friesen V. Wallace and Hagar C. Joseph– Facial Action Coding System, Salt Lake City, USA, 2002, p.23

e) *Adapting gestures* - those stereotypical gestures we make in conditions of concentration or mental tension (twisting of strands of hair, distancing a glass of water, etc).

Analyzing the most important elements of non-verbal communication

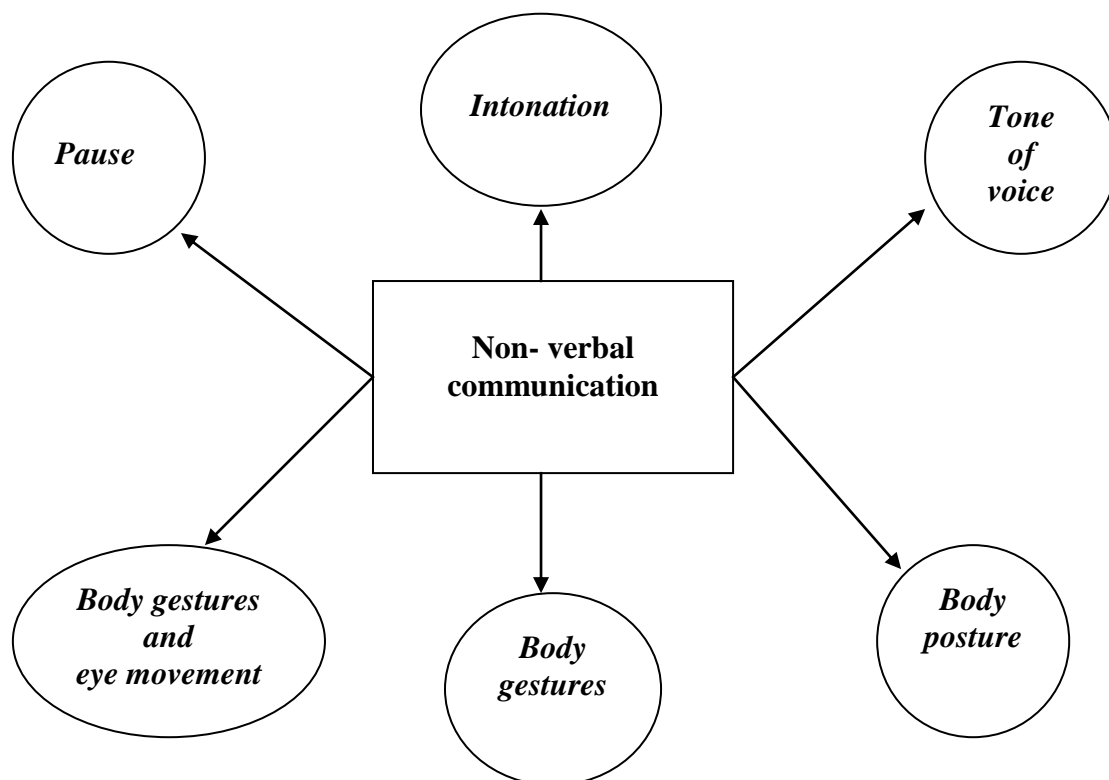


Figure 1 Defining elements of non-verbal communication

A. Intonation

Intonation is the way that the sender's pitch of voice rises and falls when speaking. For example, it shows the interpreter whether the speaker expresses his or her message in the form of a question or statement. In the first case, the voice rises at the end of the phrase or the sentence and in the second case, it falls. At the same time, intonation indicates the end of an entity of information, which – in written communication – is shown by means of a comma, semicolon, point, exclamation mark or question mark. Another function of intonation is to lay emphasis on a particular word or idea, a detail that the interpreter must not fail to be aware of.

B. Tone of voice

The tone of voice is a means by which the speaker implies his or her attitude to the message. It is also a means by which he seeks a reaction from the hearer. In a political debate, for instance, the tone of voice is likely to be rousing, whereas on television the daily news is communicated in a more factual tone. Other examples of tone of voice are: aggressive, critical, nervous, disappointed, monotonous, friendly, enthusiastic, vivid, persuasive, etc.

C. Body posture

Body posture is the bearing or the position of the speaker's body. It is a more or less stable state and thus not to be confused with body gestures which are movements. Body posture can be characteristic and assumed for a special purpose or it can correspond to the normal expectations in the context of a particular situation.

Obviously one can be lying down, seating, or standing. Normally, these are not the elements of posture that convey messages. However, when the speaker is slouched or erect, his or her legs crossed or arms folded, such postures convey a degree of formality or relaxation. Once more, they can also transfer symbolic messages on the orator's attitude or intention with regard to the message.

D. Body gestures

A body gesture is a movement made with a limb, especially the hands, to express, confirm, emphasize or back up the speaker's attitude or intention. This non-verbal activity is regularly used in oral discourse. If a body act requires no verbal accompaniment, it is called an "emblem". Examples are: hand signals such as waving good-bye, the "V" for victory sign or the "high five" signaling victory. While some emblems, for example a clenched fist, have universal meaning, there are others that are idiosyncratic or culturally conditioned. The use of the zero shape made by the fingers, for instance, does not mean the same thing in different cultures. Standing for "OK" in the UK, it may be a vulgar expression in South American cultures, sometimes embarrassingly so... Body gestures are always perceived and interpreted together with facial expressions.

E. Facial expressions and eye movement

Facial expressions are dynamic features which communicate the speaker's attitude, emotions, intentions, and so on. The face is the primary source of emotions. During oral communication, facial expressions change continually and are constantly monitored and interpreted by the receiver. Examples are: a smile, frown, raised eyebrow, yawn or sneer.

Eye movement is a key part of facial behavior because the eyes are invariably involved in facial displays. The different forms are observed to be cross-cultural. The frequency of eye contact may suggest either interest or boredom or may even betray dishonesty.

The direct stare of the speaker can show candor or openness. Downward glances are generally associated with modesty; eyes rolled upwards are conveyed as a sign of fatigue.

We noticed that certain facial areas reveal our emotional state better than others. For example the eyes tend to show happiness, sadness or even surprise. The lower face can also express happiness or surprise; a smile, for instance, can communicate friendliness or cooperation. As for the lower face, brows and forehead are known to reveal mostly anger.

F. Pause

A pause can have two different functions:

1. It can be a brief suspension of the voice to indicate the limits and relations of sentences and their parts. A pause then assumes a similar function in oral discourse to intonation.
2. It can consist of a temporary vocal inaction revealing the speaker's uncertainty, hesitation, tension or uneasiness. In this context, a pause can also be judgmental by indicating favor or disfavor, agreement or disagreement. Consequently, the non-verbal cue of a pause can give rise to problems when interpreting it because its meaning can vary considerably. It can have a positive or negative influence on the process of communication.

Learning how to "read" body messages of the people with whom we interact daily in business is not complicated. In fact, everyone is at hand because, depending on

context and other nonverbal signals that we should have in view for a fair decoding, we can observe human behavior and how they react in different situations.

Each of us has a certain position that we develop as a result of our customs over the years. Some of us have shoulders and head pointing straight ahead, others have shoulders fallen and they walk as if carrying a huge burden on the back. These are only two specific cases used for illustration, but this doesn't exclude the existence of others.

The posture of those in front of us can show us how we can approach them: if someone would sit with its shoulders down, with arms crossed and leaning to one side, he would seem unprepared for the tasks that would be given to him or he is disinterested compared to our proposal. But if the same person would stand with shoulders straight, head up, arms at his sides and fists tight, he will send that is ready for any task we will give him, regardless to its difficulty or the effort required for achieving it.

The differences between the use of verbal elements and the use of non-verbal elements can be described as the difference between doing and communicating about doing. It is believed that non-verbal communication is continuous, while verbal communication is discontinuous. Furthermore, as we have seen, verbal activity never stands alone – it is always joined by non-verbal action. Non-verbal action can be dynamic and spontaneous, but usually it is patterned by the respective culture. A successful interpretation of non-verbal elements conveyed by the speaker requires the same understanding of the symbols shared between interpreter and speaker.

If the participants have a shared understanding of non-verbal meanings, the interpreter can also predict the non-verbal action of the speaker. Predictability is extremely important for interpreters. That is, thanks to the interpreters' unconscious or conscious knowledge of the culturally determined non-verbal elements, they are able to predict what exactly is going to be said, or are able to detect the meaning in an early stage of the discourse. Thus, predictability of meaning in the field of interpretation is not only a result of the interpreter's general culture, but also a result of his ability to interpret non-verbal communication.

CONCLUSIONS

Non-verbal communication is not only crucial in a plain daily communication situation but also for the interpreter. Non-verbal communication can take various forms, each of which illustrates or replaces a certain part of the verbal communication. It includes many more elements than one might think at first.

In order to be able to work properly, interpreters need to make sense of non-verbal cues. This is only possible because a special part of our brain deals with the emotional part of the message. Not only intelligence but also emotional intelligence is needed for interpreting non-verbal elements.

Whether non-verbal communication supports business men in their tasks or presents a difficulty depends entirely to them and their actions. In general as we advance in our careers and even in our life we tend to want more and to be at least better if not the best.

Learning the non-verbal language is a very difficult task that takes a lot of time and a lot of practice but a very important step that guarantees our success in business. By success I mean to say that if a person can interpret non-verbal language this means that he can control his own body language and his emotions; this always guarantees success.

Not every one can verbally communicate well, but everyone can learn how to non-communicate, or to interpret the non-verbal communication of others.

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