

**CROSS AND MULTICULTURAL
UNDERSTANDING**

PBI

**VERBAL AND NONVERBAL SYMBOL
SYSTEM**

SESSION 9

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Communication is the process of transferring message which happen with or without words. These are of two types: verbal and non-verbal.

The intended message is transferred to people non-verbally using :

- Kinesics (body language)

As we begin our discussion of the classifications of nonverbal communication you will notice that our analysis of each category starts with the behaviors found in the dominant culture of the United States. We also remind you of the integrated nature of these categories. "Messages generated by each category do not exist in isolation but rather exist in the company of messages from other categories, verbal messages, contexts, and people functioning as message receivers." Most classifications divide nonverbal messages into two comprehensive categories: those that are primarily produced by the body (appearance, movement, facial expressions, eye contact, touch, and paralanguage), and those that the individual combines with the setting (space, time, and silence).

- Haptics (touches)

Touch as a form of communication can be as effortless as holding your mate's hand, or as powerful and frightening as being touched in a sexual manner by a stranger. The meanings you assign to being touched, and your reasons for touching others, offer insights into the communication encounter.

In the dominant U.S. culture, there are six basic types of touching:

1. Accidental touching is when someone inadvertently bumps into you.

2. Professional touching is carried out by individuals such as doctors, nurses, hairdressers, or even a swimming coach moving the arms of a pupil.
3. Social politeness touching is usually associated with greeting and showing appreciation. These contacts can range from a handshake to a respectful pat on the back.
4. Friendship touches demonstrate concern and caring between family members and close friends. In this type of touching you might see actions from an extended embrace to an arm placed on a shoulder.
5. Love-intimacy touches are those touches that usually occur in romantic relationships (caressing, hugging, embracing, kissing, and the like).
6. Sexual touch, the most intimate type, is used for sexual arousal.

- Appearance

From hair sprays to hairpieces, from fat-reducing diets to 24-hour fitness centers, from false eyelashes to blue contact lenses, and from cosmetic surgery to tanning salons, people show their concern for how they appear to others. Many people in the United States now use body piercing and tattooing to alter their appearance. A study in 2010 conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 38 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 have at least one tattoo. Keating clearly underscores the sway your outer shell has on others when she writes, "The power of communication to draw others near or to drive them away derives as much from how we appear as from the language we deploy." What Keating is suggesting is, of course, what you observe daily in your personal life. Whom

you approach and whom you avoid, particularly in regard to first impressions, might well determine future interaction, or indeed, if there will be any interaction. “Initial attraction from one person to another is frequently the precursor to actual interaction, whereas a lack of attraction may preclude people from taking any steps toward relational development.”

- Eye contact and Gaze

The eyes, and their power and sway, have always been a topic of interest and fascination. You can witness the potential communication component of eye contact when professional poker players seek to hide behind their dark glasses or a hooded sweat shirt during a tournament. The impact of eye contact on communication is also seen in the countless literary and musical allusions to eyes made over hundreds of years. Emerson wrote, “The eyes indicate the antiquity of the soul.” Shakespeare also knew the communicative potency of the eyes when he wrote, “Thou tell’st me there is murder in mine eye.” Bob Dylan underscored the same potency in his lyrics: “Your eyes said more to me that night than your lips would ever say.” Even the concept of “the evil eye” has been present in nearly every culture for centuries. The notion of an “evil eye” means being able to send another person a thought (transmitted through the eyes) that can cause damage in a host of ways. By some estimates there are approximately 70 cultures covering nearly every part of the world that believe in the influence of the evil eye. Belief in the power of the evil eye (mal de ojo) is seen in Mexico and Puerto Rico, where “Mothers may isolate their children for fear of having one become a victim of mal de ojo.”

Eye contact and gaze are essential to the study of human communication for a number of reasons. First, eyes express emotions, monitor feedback, indicate degrees of attentiveness and interest, regulate the flow of the conversation, influence changes in attitude, define power and status relationships, and help modify impression management.

Second, eyes are significant to the communication process because of the number of messages they can send. We have all heard some of the following words used to describe a person's eyes: direct, sensual, sardonic, cruel, expressive, intelligent, penetrating, sad, cheerful, worldly, hard, trusting, and suspicious. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, much of eye contact is directly related to culture. On both a conscious and unconscious level you have "learned" the significance of eye contact and the "rules" for employing (or not employing) eye contact. As Tubbs and Moss point out, "The many rules implicit in our culture about looking at others are a tacit admission that eye contact is perhaps the single most important facial cue we use in communicating." These rules become quite evident when people are in an elevator with strangers. Also, reflect on the discomfort felt when someone stares at you for a long period of time.

Before offering some comparisons that demonstrate culture's influence, we shall briefly discuss how eye contact is used by the dominant culture in the United States. As Triandis notes, looking another person directly in the eye is very common in the United States. Not only is it the rule, but for most members of the dominant culture, eye contact is highly valued. "For Americans, a direct gaze signals a positive connection from one person to another and communicates caring and common courtesy. If we turn away

when speaking to others, we communicate that the words we are saying are difficult or we are thinking about other things.” The implication is that if you fail to use direct eye contact you risk being perceived as showing a lack of interest, trying to hide something, or even being deceitful.

But what is normal in the United States can be unacceptable in other cultures. In Japan prolonged eye contact may be considered discourteous and disrespectful. It is not uncommon for the Japanese to look down or away or even close their eyes while engaging in conversation. You can probably appreciate the problems that might arise if Americans are not aware of the Japanese use of eye contact. Americans who are culturally unaware often interpret Japanese eye contact, or lack of it, “as signs of disagreement, disinterest, or rejection.”

Dresser notes that “People from many Asian, Latino, and Caribbean cultures also avoid eye contact as a sign of respect.” This same orientation toward eye contact is found in many parts of Africa, where “Making eye contact when communicating with a person who is older or of higher status is considered a sign of disrespect or even aggression ... where respect is shown by lowering the eyes.” There is even a Zulu saying: “The eye is an organ of aggression.” India and Egypt provide two additional examples of eye contact mirroring a cultural value. “In India, the amount of eye contact that is appropriate depends on one’s social position (people of different socioeconomic classes avoid eye contact with each other).” In Egypt, where the issue is not social status but gender, “Women and men who are strangers may avoid eye contact out of modesty and respect for religious rules.” We should point out, at least as it applies to gender and globalization,

the use of eye contact involving women is “changing as more women throughout the world enter the job market and rise to higher levels.”

The avoidance of direct eye contact is not the case among Arabs who use very direct eye contact between same-sex communicators. This contact is not only direct, but extends over a long period of time. For “outsiders” this directness often appears as a form of staring. Yet for Arab males this visual intensity is employed so that they can infer the “truthfulness” of the other person’s words. Notice how the words “same-sex” were used in our portrayal of Arab eye contact. The reason is that where gender segregation is the norm (such as in Saudi Arabia) direct eye contact between men and women is often avoided.

In North America the prolonged stare is frequently part of the nonverbal code used in the gay male co-culture. When directed toward a member of the same sex, an extended stare, like certain other nonverbal messages, is often perceived as a signal of interest and sexual suggestion. A few other differences in the use of eye contact in the United States are worth noting. Eye contact, or a lack of it, can create misunderstandings between African Americans and members of the dominant culture. The reason is simple: African Americans often do not find it necessary to engage in direct eye contact at all times during a conversation. This same uncomfortable feeling toward direct and prolonged eye contact can be found among Mexican Americans who “consider sustained eye contact when speaking directly to someone as rude. Direct eye contact with superiors may be interpreted as insolence. Avoiding direct eye contact with superiors is a sign of respect.”

Among members of the dominant culture in the United States there are also gender variations in how people use their eyes to communicate. Research on the subject of gender differences in the use of eye contact indicates that in most instances, “women are much more visually oriented than are men.” This characteristic manifests itself by the fact that “Women look more at other people, attempt to make more eye contact, and are also looked at more than men.” As you might expect, eye contact is a very important consideration when communicating with members of the deaf community who are employing American Sign Language. Among members of the deaf co-culture who are “signing,” there is a belief that eye contact is an especially important part of their communication process. Turning your back to people who are “signing” is essentially the same as ignoring them. So delicate is the use of eye contact that you seldom realize the modifications you make when communicating. For example, the next time you are speaking with a disabled person, perhaps someone in a wheelchair, notice how little eye contact you have in comparison with someone who is not disabled. This practice is all too common and, unfortunately, may be interpreted as a lack of interest and concern.

- Paralanguage

When the German poet Klopstock wrote, “The tones of human voices are mightier than strings or brass to move the soul,” he knew that the sounds people produce contain subliminal messages that influence how people feel. Most of you probably have viewed a foreign film with subtitles. During those intervals when the subtitles were not on the screen, you heard the actors

speaking an unfamiliar language but could understand some of what was happening just from the sound of the voices. Perhaps you inferred that the performers were expressing anger, sorrow, or joy, or recognized who the hero was and who was cast in the role of the villain. The rise and fall of voices also may have told you when one person was asking a question and when another was making a statement or issuing a command. Whatever the case, certain vocal cues provided you with information with which to make judgments about the characters' personalities. You could only speculate on the exact meaning of the words being spoken, but voice inflections still revealed a great deal about what was happening. Research reveals that how a person's voice sounds can influence perceptions related to the individual's emotional state, social class, credibility, comprehension, and personality. What we have been talking about is called paralanguage. It denotes the features that accompany speech and contribute to the meanings people assign to the overall transaction. Most classifications divide paralanguage into three categories:

- (1) vocal qualities
- (2) vocal characterizers
- (3) vocal segregates.

And verbally using words, which includes :

- Speaking
- Writing
- Denotation (dictionary meaning) or Connotation (feelings associated with meaning of words)

- Tone and Volume

Both these modes of communication are used in parallel to generate the intended outcome.

DEFINITION OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Verbal communication is auditory communication with words. It is mostly face-to-face or written with the use of language as a means. Nowadays, technologies like phone and internet have allowed oral communication to take place without being in the same place or writing.

Here, tone and volume of the spoken words or sound matter the most along with the words. Similarly, denotation and connotation are other factors that send intended meaning of message. So, choosing right words according to situations is important.

Verbal communication might fail in inter-cultural situations due to meanings and symbols being different.

DEFINITION OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Wordless communications fall under non-verbal communication. It is conveyed as visual cues. Body language, gestures, facial expressions, touch, etc. are few examples of non-verbal communication.

It is noticed and interpreted more than words. It also communicates more messages. It is used to interpret whether verbal communication is true and authentic, or not.

Non-verbal communication can be different according to place, culture and individual differences. There is no specific interpretation, rather the interpretations are open.

Similarities between verbal and non-verbal communication

Verbal and non-verbal communications are not contradictory in their uses. They go side by side. Combination of verbal and non-verbal communication make communication effective. In most cases, one doesn't exist without the other. For example, laughing at a joke and saying it is funny.

According to a researcher Wertheim, non-verbal communication plays different roles in communication. It can play one of these five roles: reinforcement, substitution, contradiction, accentuation and regulation.

Both forms of communications are learned and are not innate in most cases. There are some innate verbal or non-verbal communications like crying, groaning in pain, etc. Except those, people learn most of non-verbal communications like that of table manners and so on.

Differences between verbal and non-verbal communication

Mentioned below are the differences between verbal and non-verbal communication that make each of them unique:

1. Importance and structure

Different cultures have developed language and words through centuries into what it is today. This has made communication easier and reliable. This is why verbal communication is important.

- Verbal communication is a structured communication as it has grammar rules and gives clear messages.
- Non-verbal communication is not structured; it does not have specific patterns. It can be interpreted as anyone's wish. However, non-verbal communication is important as it supports verbal communication by adding flavor to it. But, it does not happen the other way round.

2. Discretion and Continuousness

- Verbal communication has start point and stop points.
- Non-verbal communication keeps going on without interruptions. Even when alone, interpersonal processes keep occurring at individual level. Even after people stop talking, they keep showing non-verbal cues. For example, glares after a fight or smiles after something good.

3. Chances of Miscommunication

- Each word in verbal communication has distinct meanings and has less chance of being misinterpreted.
- There are about 4000 distinct facial expressions that people can make with 20 muscles in the face. Along with that, there are so many other types of non-verbal communications. So, there is a greater chance of those signs that can be misinterpreted.

4. Neuro-physiological processing

- Verbal stimuli are interpreted by the left hemisphere of brain which helps in analyzing and reasoning. This happens most of the time but brain does not follow it all the time.
- Non-verbal communications are interpreted by right hemisphere of the brain. These interpretations involve spatial, pictorial and gestalt activities in the brain, and create elicited responses.

5. Time consumption

- Verbal communication is fast and efficient.
- Non-verbal communication is more time consuming than verbal communications. For example, sign language news is more time consuming than others presented verbally.

6. Miscommunication according to places and situations

- Verbal communication also has immediate feedback, whereas it is not always possible in non-verbal. This is because people do not show emotions right then but take some time.
- Miscommunication in verbal communication happens less than in non-verbal communication. For example, in Russia, smile is considered to be impolite. Whereas in most of other parts of the world it is a positive gesture.

But, this doesn't mean non-verbal is misinterpreted in all the situations. It is better at communicating feelings and emotions, even though it is slow. It

even shows what a sentence might mean in a particular situation. For example, a sarcastic sentence and a compliment seems the same verbally. But, the intentions can only be interpreted through non-verbal cues.

7. Presence and distance

- Verbal communication can use any means like letters, chat, phone, etc. Distance does not matter in verbal communication
- People must be face to face to show and receive non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication cannot occur in long distance

8. Documentary Evidences

- Verbal communication are loud and people witness it. So, there can be documentary evidences of it as other people might have heard. It can be taken as an evidence.
- In non-verbal communication, many people do not witness and have less evidences. Conclusive documentary evidences are less in non-verbal communication. It only happens if there are eye-witnesses as it is visual cues.

9. Which is More in use

Albert Mehrabian had conducted a research on verbal and non-verbal communication in 1960. The study showed that nonverbal communication is more important than verbal. According to it, 55% meaning of any message is generated by face and body. Another 38% is derived from the way anyone

speaks (tone, volume, etc.) and only other 7% from words said. These three parts of communication are the 3 V's. This study shows that receivers take about 93 % from non-verbal communication and only 7 % from verbal communication and when verbal and non-verbal communication contradicts, non-verbal is mostly true. You should believe in non-verbal cues. People cannot control their non-verbal communications all the time and fake the non-verbal cues.

Uses of Verbal and Non-verbal Communication

The major use of verbal communication are to inform or impart knowledge, as words are very powerful. It can be used as a tool of persuasion. It is used to have debates, discuss and show creativity. It can also be used to establish relationships as words are used to express feelings. It is needed for social situations. Whereas, non-verbal communication like touch and eye contact express closeness and emotions.

For example: Holding hands can express love better than words like "love you". The 5 major uses of non-verbal communication are modifying speech, replacing speech, controlling communication, conveying personality and expressing emotions. It also helps in maintaining interpersonal relationships, supporting verbal communication and perform.

So, we can say verbal and non-verbal communication does not always have to be different. It also has many similarities and goes hand in hand.

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