

Nonverbal Communication – Present and Future

Gabriela Gogoș, Toma Georgescu

Universitatea Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești, Bd. București 39, Ploiești
e-mail: management_gabi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Verbal communication is the primary communication skill taught in the formal education system and it includes things such as reading, writing, computer skills, e-mail, talking on the phone, writing memos, and speaking to others. Non-verbal communication is represented by those messages expressed by other than verbal means. Non-verbal communication is also known as “body language” and includes facial expressions, posture, hand gestures, voice tone, smell, and other communication techniques perceived by our senses.

Key words: *body language, nonverbal communication*

We cannot communicate and even when we don't speak, our non-verbal communications convey a message. Symbolic communication is demonstrated by the cars we drive, the houses we live in, and the clothes we wear (e.g. uniforms – police, military). The most important aspects of symbolic communication are the words we use. Words, in fact, have no meaning; rather we attach meaning to them through our own interpretation. Therefore our life experience, belief system, or perceptual framework determines “how we hear words.” Rudyard Kipling wrote, “Words are of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.” In other words, we hear what we expect to hear based on our interpretation of what the words mean.

According to social scientists, verbal communication skills account for 7% of the communication process. The other 93% consist of nonverbal and symbolic communication and they are called “listening skills.” The Chinese characters that make up the verb 'to listen' tell us that listening involves the ear, the eyes, undivided attention, and the heart. It is described in numerous studies as the most prominent kind of communication. It has been identified as one of the most frequent problems in marriage, one of the most important in family and social settings, and one of the most important on-the-job communication skills. Often people think that because they can hear, listening is a natural ability. It is not. Listening effectively requires considerable skill and practice and it is a learned skill. Listening skills have been described as either “listening with our hearts” or “hearing between the words.”

Each of us gives and responds to thousands of nonverbal messages daily in our personal and professional lives--and while commuting back and forth between the two. From the morning kiss to business suits and stiff-upper-lip displays at the conference table, we react to wordless messages emotionally, often without knowing why. The boss's head-nod, the clerk's bow tie, the next-door neighbor's hairstyle--we notice the minutia of nonverbal behavior because their details reveal a. how we relate to each other, and b. who we think we are.

Nonverbal communication is learned and practiced often on an unconscious level. We attract people by using these nonverbal signals, and sometimes those we attract (or who are attracted to us) are unwholesome. As we grow older and become more aware of ourselves we should be able to recognize and weed out the unwholesome in favor of those for whom we have an affinity.

The process of sending and receiving *wordless messages* includes facial expressions, gaze, gestures, postures, and *tones of voice*. There are included *grooming* habits, body positioning in *space*, and *consumer product* design (e.g., *clothing cues*, *food products*, artificial *colors* and *tastes*, engineered *aromas*, *media* images and computer-graphic displays). Nonverbal cues include *all* expressive *signs*, *signals* and *cues* (audio, visual, tactile, chemical, etc. which are used to send and receive messages apart from manual sign language and *speech*).

Body language can be disguised behind a mask out of a fear of rejection. This can discourage wanted and needed relationships from developing. Those who want and need certain relationships to develop must re-acquire their nonverbal skills and unmask themselves in order to avoid alienation.

Body language is open to misinterpretation just as verbal communication is. It must be interpreted in the context of one's lifestyle, family, cultural background, and other factors that may be obscure. Each person has a limited repertoire of gestures and uses the same gestures to signify certain feelings. Gestures also can occur in clusters, so that while any particular gesture alone may not mean much, when it is reinforced by other gestures in a cluster the feeling or attitude being projected is confirmed.

Role Playing Techniques

Often people cannot easily understand the impact of the nonverbal communications involved in a situation unless it is replayed and pointed out. For this, the role playing technique called "the mirror" is often effective. An individual's behavior is simply portrayed by another group member. The director asks others in the group if the portrayal was accurate, and if not, the behavior is replayed again until some consensus is gained regarding its closeness to the original behavior. The person who displayed the behavior to begin with, the one getting the feedback, is thus able to see how she had been behaving.

Another variation of this is that of role reversal, in which the protagonist, the person whose problem is the focus of the group at the moment, changes parts with another group member (the "auxiliary") who plays the role of the other character in the protagonist scene. When the auxiliary, in the role of the protagonist, repeats the behavior, the protagonist in the role of the other person in the scene experiences the impact of that behavior. Whether it can be manipulative coyness, subtle intimidation, helplessness, passive-aggressiveness, or other types of interpersonal relatedness, the protagonist is helped to own the meaning (at least to others) of his or her own actions.

The most powerful technique, though, is that of exaggeration. Whatever slight element is being expressed, to bring attention to it, the protagonist has to exaggerate the movement or voice element. This exaggeration can be repeated at an even greater magnification, and then exaggerated yet another degree more. In these more expressive movements or amplified states, the underlying affect and possibly the hidden assumption or attitude tends to come more sharply into awareness.

A related technique is that of variation— doing it either in the opposite way or in another way. The resulting contrasts may again bring a hidden meaning of a certain behavior into sharper awareness.

Personal Space

Referring to the comfortable or uncomfortable distance between people, experiment with other group members, using your intuition to say “stop” when others move towards or away from you. However, if those others play the parts of parents, lovers, or children, explore which kinds of closeness they consider appropriate. Then imagine the other person to be from a quite foreign culture, and sense into your acceptable personal space.

Cultural norms dictate a comfortable distance for interaction with students. You should look for signals of discomfort caused by invading students' space. Some of these are:

- rocking;
- leg swinging;
- tapping;
- gaze aversion.

Typically, in large college classes space invasion is not a problem. In fact, there is usually too much distance. To counteract this, move around the classroom to increase interaction with your students. Increasing proximity enables you to have better eye contact and increases the opportunities for students to speak.

You can easily invade someone's space through this type of communication. If it is used reciprocally, it indicates solidarity; if not used reciprocally, it tends to indicate differences in status. Touch does not only facilitate the sending of the message, but the emotional impact of the message as well.

Personal space is your “bubble” - the space you place between yourself and others. This invisible boundary becomes apparent only when someone bumps or tries to enter your bubble. The way you identify your personal space and use the environment in which you find yourself influences your ability to send or receive messages. How close do you stand to the one with you are communicating with? Where do you sit in the room? How do you position yourself with respect to others at a meeting? All of these things affect your level of comfort, and the level of comfort of those receiving your message. Goldhaber says there are three basic principles that summarize the use of personal space in an organization: The higher your position (status) in the organization,

- the more and better space you will have;
- the better protected your territory will be, and
- the easier it will be to invade the territory of lower-status personnel.

The impact of use of space on the communication process is related directly to the environment in which space is maintained.

Eye Contact

Experiment with different times for glancing, gazing, and staring. One can keep contact for 2 seconds or 20 seconds. When does it feel “right” and when does it become intrusive? Experiment also with the frequency of making eye contact. One can look away, and then look at the person every 5 seconds, holding that gaze as mentioned above for varying lengths of time; or perhaps look at the person only every minute or so. At what point does it become flirtatious or spooky?

Position

Here's an exercise „Set up an interaction”, say, between a parent and a child. Play the scene first at a 90 degree angle, then, carry on with the parent standing and the child sitting. Continue the scene as the child turns his or her back to the parent. Then further pursue the interaction with the parent sitting and the child standing, facing each other. Finish the dialogue with both people standing face to face. Other variables may be combined. How does it feel for the parent–or the child–when the parent stands behind or behind-and-slightly-to-the side with the hands resting gently on the shoulders? Note how certain positions tend to generate corresponding attitudes.

Posture

Obviously one can be lying down, can be seated or standing. These are not the elements of posture that convey messages. Are we slouched or erect? Are our legs crossed or our arms folded? Such postures convey a degree of formality and a degree of relaxation in the communication exchange.

You communicate numerous messages by the way you walk, talk, stand and sit. Standing erect, but not rigid, and leaning slightly forward communicates to students that you are approachable, receptive and friendly. Furthermore, interpersonal closeness results when you and your students face each other. Speaking with your back turned or looking at the floor or ceiling should be avoided; it communicates disinterest to your class.

Facial Expression

Using combinations of muscles around forehead, eyes, mouth, the tilt of the head, eye gaze, and jaw, hundreds of subtle expressions may be formed. Use the actor's technique of standing in front of a mirror while you explore the different kinds of expressions and enact these so that you can clearly demonstrate the differences to yourself. Drooping or lifting your eyelids, tightening the muscles around your eyes or lips, and numerous other physical expressions can significantly alter your expression.

Facial expressions usually communicate emotions. The expressions tell the attitudes of the communicator. Researchers have discovered that certain facial areas reveal our emotional state better than others. For example, the eyes tend to reveal happiness or sadness, and even surprise. The lower face also can reveal happiness or surprise; the smile, for example, can communicate friendliness and cooperation. The lower face, brows, and forehead can also reveal anger. Mehrabian believes verbal cues provide 7 percent of the meaning of the message; vocal cues, 38 percent; and facial expressions, 55 percent. This means that, as the receiver of a message, you can rely heavily on the facial expressions of the sender because his expressions are a better indicator of the meaning behind the message than his words.

Gesture

Similarly, explore the feelings involved in doing or perceiving some of the following: clenching, fist shaking, finger pointing etc.

Without gestures, our world would be static and colorless. Gestures and body language communicate as effectively as words- maybe even more effectively. We use gestures daily, almost instinctively, from beckoning to a waiter, or punctuating a business presentation with visual signals to airport ground attendants guiding an airline pilot into the jetway or a parent using a whole dictionary of gestures to teach (or preach to) a child.

Gestures are woven inextricably in to our social lives, but also that the “vocabulary” of gestures, can be at once informative and entertaining... but also dangerous. Gestures can be menacing (two drivers on a freeway) or warm (an open-armed welcome). Instructive (a police man giving road directions), or even sensuous (the coiling movement of a Hawaiian hula dancer).

If you fail to gesture while speaking, you may be perceived as boring, stiff and unanimated. A lively and animated teaching style captures students’ attention, makes the material more interesting, facilitates learning and provides a bit of entertainment. Head nods, a form of gestures, communicate positive reinforcement to students and indicate that you are listening.

Touch

As an exercise, have one person in your group take another by the wrist to draw him forward; compare that to a gentle or firm grip on the back of the upper arm, or on the shoulder, or in the middle of the back. Is the gesture a push or a tug? Is the touch closer to a pat, a rub, or a grabbing? Experiment in dyads with different forms of personal contact, making clear boundaries when some behavior feels like it's becoming uncomfortable.

The field of nonverbal communications has grown rapidly over the last few decades, and it has applications in business, media, international relations, education, and indeed any field which significantly involves interpersonal and group dynamics.

Paralinguistics

This side of nonverbal communication includes such vocal elements as:

- tone;
- pitch;
- rhythm;
- timbre;
- loudness;
- inflection.

For maximum teaching effectiveness, learn to vary these six elements of your voice. One of the major criticisms is of instructors who speak in a monotone. Listeners perceive these instructors as boring and dull. Students report that they learn less and lose interest more quickly when listening to teachers who have not learned to modulate their voices.

Humor

Humor is often overlooked as a teaching tool, and it is too often not encouraged in college classrooms. Laughter releases stress and tension for both instructor and student. You should develop the ability to laugh at yourself and encourage students to do the same. It fosters a friendly classroom environment that facilitates learning. (Lou Holtz wrote that when his players felt successful he always observed the presence of good humor in the locker room).

Obviously, adequate knowledge of the subject matter is crucial to your success; however, it's not the only crucial element. Creating a climate that facilitates learning and retention demands good nonverbal and verbal skills. To improve your nonverbal skills, record your speaking on video tape. Then ask a colleague in communications to suggest refinements.

Forward and Backward Movements

If you extend a hand straight forward during an interview or tend to lean forward, Lamb considers you to be an “operator”- good for an organization requiring an infusion of energy or dramatic change of course.

Vertical Movements

If you tend to draw yourself up to your tallest during the handshake, Lamb considers you to be a “presenter.” You are a master at selling yourself or the organization in which you are employed.

Side-to-Side Movements

If you take a lot of space while talking by moving your arms, you are a good informer and good listener. You are best suited for an organization seeking a better sense of direction. Lamb believes there is a relationship between the positioning of the body and movements of the limbs and facial expressions. He has observed harmony between the two. On the other hand, if certain gestures are rehearsed, such as those made to impress others, there is a tendency to separate the posture and the movements. Harmony disappears.

Silence and Time

Silence can be a positive or negative influence in the communication process. It can provide a link between messages or sever relationships. It can create tension and uneasiness or create a peaceful situation. Silence can also be judgmental by indicating favor or disfavor - agreement or disagreement. For example, suppose a manager finds a couple of his staff members resting. If he believes these staff members are basically lazy, the idleness conveys to him that they are “goofing off” and should be given additional assignments. If he believes these staff members are self-motivated and good workers, the idleness conveys to him that they are taking a well-deserved “break.” If he is personally insecure, the idleness conveys to him that they are threatening his authority.

Time can be an indicator of status. How long will you give the staff member who wishes to speak to you? How long will you make him wait to see you? Do you maintain a schedule? Is your schedule such that your subordinates must arrange their schedules to suit yours? In a healthy organization, the manager and his subordinates use time to communicate their mutual respect to each other.

Closing Thoughts

Regardless of your position in the organization it is important for you to develop some sensitivity to nonverbal messages. Cooperation improves as we recognize and respond appropriately to non-verbal cues. Of course you have been aware of non-verbal communication assets all of your life, but how much thought have you given them?

Practical Steps for More Effective Listening

1. Talk less. One of my students used to say that when she facilitated classes she always told her students that God gave you one mouth and two ears – that should tell you something.

2. Get rid of distractions. If it is important for you to listen, do everything you can to eliminate internal and external noise and distractions that interfere with careful listening.
3. Don't judge prematurely. All of us are guilty of forming snap judgements and evaluating others before hearing them out especially when the speaker's ideas conflict with our own.
4. Look for key ideas. We think much faster than people speak. To help focus attention (rather than drift off in boredom) extract the central idea.
5. Ask sincere questions. 'Devil's advocate' questions are really statements or criticisms in disguise. Sincere questions are requests for new information that clarifies a speaker's thoughts or feelings.
6. Paraphrase. Rephrase the speaker's thoughts in your own words to make sure your interpretation as a listener is accurate.
7. Suspend your own agenda. In other words, while you are listening, concentrate on what the speaker is saying, not on what you think.
8. Empathic listening. Empathic listening is knowing that given the same set of circumstances you might have done the same thing. It is the ability to experience the world from the other's point of view. It doesn't necessarily mean that you agree, but that you understand.
9. Open your heart with love. Often we listen to score points and make ourselves right and the other person wrong. When we open our hearts to each other, we do so with the belief that we are all the same. We have the same feelings, fears, and hurts: doing the best we can with what we know.

Body Language of Lies:

- Physical expression will be limited and stiff, with few arm and hand movements. Hand, arm and leg movement are toward their own body the liar takes up less space.
- A person who is lying to you will avoid making eye contact.
- Hands touching their face, throat & mouth. Touching or scratching the nose or behind their ear. Not likely to touch his chest/heart with an open hand.
- Timing and duration of emotional gestures and emotions are off a normal pace. The display of emotion is delayed, stays longer it would naturally, then stops suddenly.
- Timing is off between emotions gestures/expressions and words. Example: Someone says "I love it!" when receiving a gift, and then smile after making that statement, rather than at the same time the statement is made.
- Gestures/expressions don't match the verbal statement, such as frowning when saying "I love you."
- Expressions are limited to mouth movements when someone is faking emotions (like happy, surprised, sad, awe,) instead of the whole face. For example; when someone smiles naturally their whole face is involved: jaw/cheek movement, eyes and forehead push down, etc.
- A guilty person gets defensive. An innocent person will often go on the offensive.
- A liar is uncomfortable facing his questioner/accuser and may turn his head or body away.
- A liar might unconsciously place objects (book, coffee cup, etc.) between themselves and you.

Verbal Context and Content

- A liar will use your words to make answer a question. When asked, “Did you eat the last cookie?” The liar answers, “No, I did not eat the last cookie.”
- A statement with a contraction is more likely to be truthful: “ I didn't do it” instead of “I did not do it”
- Liars sometimes avoid “lying” by not making direct statements. They imply answers instead of denying something directly.
- The guilty person may speak more than natural, adding unnecessary details to convince you... they are not comfortable with silence or pauses in the conversation.
- A liar may leave out pronouns and speak in a monotonous tone. When a truthful statement is made the pronoun is emphasized as much or more than the rest of the words in a statement.
- Words may be garbled and spoken softly, and syntax and grammar may be off. In other words, his sentences will likely be muddled rather than emphasized.
- If you believe someone is lying, then change subject of a conversation quickly, a liar follows along willingly and becomes more relaxed. The guilty wants the subject changed; an innocent person may be confused by the sudden change in topics and will want to go back to the previous subject.

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Comunicarea non-verbală – prezent și viitor

Rezumat

Comunicarea non-verbală este cea care primează în sistemul educației formale și include scrisul, cititul, abilitățile de lucru cu calculatorul, poșta electronică, dialogul la telefon, dialogul cu ceilalți. Comunicarea non-verbală, numită și limbajul trupului, include expresiile faciale, postura, gestică, tonul vocii precum și alte elemente percepute prin simțuri.