

# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

*Man cannot but communicate; even if he is silent, his body speaks.*

## *Learning Objective*

To enable the learner to perceive the role of body language, vocal elements, use of space and time in oral communication and to help him imbibe the skills of using them effectively for success both in his career and life.

## **IMPORTANCE**

A form of communication in which words are not used is called non-verbal communication. Anthropologists point out that man used non-verbal means for hundreds of years before he developed a system of linguistic symbols for communication. Nature did not bestow the gift of speech on animals and even today they communicate only non-verbally. For example, you can easily understand whether a dog is friendly or hostile by observing its body movements. Similarly, if an elephant raises its trunk and rushes towards you with a loud trumpet, you can make out that it is coming to attack you. Despite sophistication attained in the system of linguistic communication, men, like animals, continue to use non-verbal means of communication with great effect. In fact, many of these means are instinctive, natural and spontaneous. Some of these are culture-specific, and some are universal in nature. Consider for example, smile as a means of communication. The smile of a Russian child expresses the same feelings as that of an American child: comfort, wellness, friendliness and liking.

Before we discuss the nature and types of non-verbal communication, let us distinguish it from verbal communication. In general, non-verbal communication is:

- less structured than verbal communication;
- spontaneous and often unplanned; and
- complementary to speech.



The use of appropriate means of non-verbal communication exercises a greater impact. If there is a conflict between the two, the former would more truthfully reveal the intention and attitude of the speaker. The use of some of the means of non-verbal communication is automatic. For example, you smile while greeting a friend or while welcoming a dear relative to your home.

In modern business transactions, the importance of non-verbal communication has considerably increased. Studies show that approximately 10% of the message is conveyed by words, 38% by voice and the rest 52% by visual means. In fact, certain companies have devised programmes to train their employees in the art of using non-verbal means, specially in the context of globalisation of business. It is, therefore, necessary to understand their role and significance.

There are numerous means of non-verbal communication. Here, we shall discuss the major ones and see how they contribute to the effectiveness of verbal communication. Let us group them into the following four categories:

## MEANS

1. KINESICS (The language of body)
  - Personal appearance
  - Facial expression
  - Eye contact
  - Movement
  - Posture
  - Gesture
2. PARALINGUISTICS (The language of voice)
  - Quality
  - Volume
  - Pace
  - Pitch
  - Pronunciation
  - Pauses
3. PROXEMICS (The language of space)
  - Intimate space
  - Personal space
  - Social space
  - Public space
4. CHRONEMICS (The language of time)

Let us now look at the various means one by one to understand their role in communication.

### **Kinesics (The Language of Body)**

In face to face interaction, body language plays an important role. We begin to form an impression about a speaker as soon as we see him. The way he is dressed, the manner in which he moves, stands, or sits—all these give a significant clue to his personality, that is, the kind of person he is. It is only rarely that our impression is belied when he speaks. A systematic study of the movement of human body in the



process of communication is called **kinesics**. A lot of research has been done in this area and the results published in the form of books. Here, we shall briefly discuss the main aspects of the personality which are significant from the communication point of view.

**Personal Appearance** The listeners would form their first impression about you from your personal appearance. You should, therefore, consider this aspect of your personality as part of the message you communicate. If you are properly dressed and look smart, you would induce among the listeners a receptive mood. They would form a favourable impression and become eager to listen to you.

'Apparel oft proclaims the man'—this is what Shakespeare said centuries ago but the statement holds good even today. The choice of your dress should suit the occasion. In general, a sober, simple, neat, formal and comfortable dress that you habitually wear would be all right for occasions such as personal interaction for a professional purpose, oral presentation, group discussion, interview, etc. If you are clean and well-groomed, a feeling of trust and expectancy would be generated and you would exude confidence and speak or interact with proper poise. And thus you would have already marched a few steps on the road to success in communication even before you start speaking.

**Facial Expression** Face is the most expressive part of the body. Its mobile features and the muscles express a number of feelings and emotions. They are used for a faithful reflection of thoughts and true feelings and sometimes also for a deliberate suppression of them. Thus, face is not always the index of the mind. Shakespeare's statement supports this view: 'One may smile and smile and be a villain'.

The expression of certain basic emotions on the face is universal. For example, generally speaking, expanded lips and smiling eyes stand for **happiness**, pursed up lips, red eyes, and contracted eyebrows for **anger**, contracted eyelids and closed lips for **sorrow**, raised eyebrows for **disapproval** or **dishelief**, tightened jaw muscles for **antagonism**, etc.

The language of the face is subtle and there are a variety of ways in which it can be manipulated. In fact, you can communicate a number of feelings or even mixed feelings in quick succession. You should, therefore be careful in reading the message being conveyed through the facial features. It would be advisable to confirm it by referring to the accompanying verbal message.

When you interact with a person or with a group, you should maintain a cheerful expression on your face. It must reflect your confidence and zeal. If you do so, you would be able to establish a quick rapport with the audience and the going would be easy.

**Eye Contact** Eye contact is one of the most effective means of communicating non-verbal messages and establishing rapport with listeners. As you may be aware, eyes reflect several personality traits such as intelligence, sincerity, confidence, conviction, etc. Raised looks indicate dominance and downcast looks suggest weakness and submission. Rightly, therefore, they are said to be the windows of the inner self. In fact, direct eye-contact often enables a speaker to overcome nervousness and self-consciousness. You should learn to use these nuances of eye contact properly so as to make an effective and positive impact on the audience. When you have to speak before a group of people, look at them and pause for a while before you say anything. To start speaking as soon as one reaches the dais shows lack of poise and creates a poor impression on the audience.

While speaking, maintain eye contact with the entire audience, looking at one pair of eyes to another around the room. But do not gaze or stare at anybody. Further, to look at the ceiling or outside through a window or at one section of the audience is a sign of rudeness or nervousness. If listeners feel that you are ignoring them, it is most likely that they would turn a deaf ear to whatever you are saying.



Moreover, through eye contact you can get the signal whether the channel of communication is open and obtain the feedback—how the listeners are reacting to what you are saying. If they do not make a direct eye contact with you, they are probably not concentrating on your talk. It would then become necessary for you to change your strategy of presentation to win back their attention.

**Movement** Movement from one place to another in front of a group of listeners also, to some extent, gives a clue about your personality and conveys a message about the kind of person you are. At the venue of speech you would be watched by the audience when you walk to the dais and from your seat to the place from where you have to speak, and when you move on the dais while speaking.

You may have had the occasion to listen to some good speakers. Did they rush when invited to take their seat on the dais? Did they get up with a jerk before starting to speak? Did they move on the dais from side to side like a pendulum or forward and backward like a piston? If they did, do not emulate them even if they spoke well. You can do better by avoiding such awkward body movements. A general rule is: walk at normal speed with an upright posture and with proper poise. This would enable you to relieve tension, help you draw the attention of listeners and change the pace of presentation.

If there is a question-answer session after your talk, you should answer from the place you are standing. You may, however, move a few steps towards the left or right side to get a little nearer to the person who asked the question but do not go too close to the audience because this is a sign of being aggressive. When the session is over, walk back to your seat gracefully and watch the rest of the proceedings with equipoise.

**Posture** Posture is the way you conduct yourself when you face an audience. The way you sit or stand reveals a lot about you. It may show the degree of your alertness, sense of purpose, confidence and self-image. The audience would begin to evaluate you even before you speak by observing your posture—the way you sit on the dais, waiting to be called upon to speak. If you sit in a relaxed manner and look straight at the audience with a cheerful expression on your face, you would create a good initial impression. The listeners are likely to become eager to hear you and your task of speaking would become easier. On the other hand, if you play with your bunch of keys, pen, buttons, note-cards, etc., you would give the impression of being nervous and ill-organised. Your posture would generate a negative attitude towards you and this may hinder the smooth flow of communication.

While speaking, keep your note-cards on the lectern. If there is no lectern, hold them in your hand without trying to hide them from the audience. If your hands are free, let them hang on the sides or keep them on the lectern. Never put them on your belly or in your pockets. Stand tall and upright with your chin parallel to the ground, pause for a while, look at the entire audience and then start speaking. Do not slump or lean on the lectern. If there is a mike, keep your mouth about eight inches away from it.

To get feedback, keep on observing the audience. If you find quite a number of persons leaning backward and sitting with crossed arms, you should change the strategy of presentation because such postures indicate that they are not interested in listening to you. On the other hand, if they are leaning forward and sitting with uncrossed arms, you can safely conclude that they are interested or eager to listen to you. After you have finished speaking, walk back to your seat with the same grace which you reflected when you went to the podium to start speaking.

**Gesture** In the present content, the term gesture refers to the movement of any part of the body such as hands, arms, fingers, head, shoulders, etc., to convey, reinforce or illustrate meaning. If you observe carefully, you can discern a regular pattern in the use of gestures. Speaking without any gesture is difficult. And if a person deliberately sits or stands like a statue while speaking, the impact of his speech would certainly be lost.



Some gestures are culture-specific. For example, in our society the moving of head downwards (nod) means acceptance or agreement whereas moving it from side to side amounts to shaking one's head in a gesture of proposal. In some Western countries it is just the reverse. In USA, scratching the table with a clenched fist is a sign of anger or emphasis whereas in the eastern countries it would be considered quite warm and a sign of bad manners. Embracing a person when introduced is considered to be an expression of warmth in some Arab countries but in the West it is viewed with displeasure.

Though gestures generally accompany speech, sometimes they are used by themselves to convey meaning. For example, by using gestures you can easily communicate 'yes', 'no', 'come', 'go', etc., without using a single word. If you have watched a mime show, you may have been amazed at the ingenuity of actor(s) to express many meanings, some of them very complex, merely by gestures.

Though there are hundreds of gestures that accompany speech, the main ones can be classified into the following five categories:

- enumerative
- descriptive
- locative
- symbolic
- emphatic

The enumerative gesture is elementary and the easiest to use. This is done by raising as many fingers as the number being enumerated. Obviously, this gesture is of limited value because it cannot be used for large numbers. In the descriptive gesture, the hands are used to show the size and shape of things being referred to in speech. The direction and movement of an object can also be indicated by this gesture. To point out the location of an object or area, locative gestures are used. For example, you may use your index finger to refer to the location of an object. Or you may use your thumb to indicate the location of something behind you. For conveying an idea or notion to the audience, symbolic gesture is used. For example, you may clasp your hands together to convey the notion of unity or cooperation. A symbolic gesture which is widely used is making the letter V (as a sign of victory) by using the index and middle finger. The emphatic gesture is used to emphasize an idea or to express determination. An example of this gesture is raising the right hand with clenched fist and moving it forward and backward in quick succession to reflect determination.

There are certain gestural mannerisms such as blinking the eyes, raising the eyebrows or shrugging the shoulders unnecessarily, which impede effective communication. It is, therefore, necessary to check whether the gestures you make while speaking are appropriate or not. This you can do by observing your gestures in a mirror or by asking your friends to let you know the oddities, if any, so that you can remove them. A few suggestions are given below to help you use gestures effectively.

1. Integrate gestures harmoniously with verbal communication.
2. Do not let any gesture overwhelm the thought. Remember, it is an aid and not a replacement for words.
3. Like words, choose the right gestures, keeping both audience and occasion in mind.
4. Do not overuse any gesture; try to use different types, wherever possible.
5. Let all gestures appear natural and spontaneous.
6. Always remember the basic functions of a gesture, namely support, illustration and reinforcement.



## Paralinguistics (The Language of Voice)

A study of non-verbal vocal cues that accompany the delivery of speech is termed as paralinguistics. For effective communication you should not only be proficient in using suitable words and body language but also be competent enough to manipulate the nuances of your voice properly. As you know, voice is a gift of nature but we need to be trained in using it for a large variety of purposes. It is unique like the personality of a person. That is why on phone we are able to recognise the persons we know by merely listening to their voice. You may have observed that an infant cannot understand the words spoken by the mother but it can certainly understand whether she is angry or loving. Sometimes we produce certain sounds or speak nonsense words to express our joy and excitement. Our groans and shrieks clearly depict pain and fear. Even animals can sense the elemental moods by listening to our voice.

In the production of voice, three most mobile speech organs that we use are lips, jaws and tongue. When we exhale the air from our lungs through vocal cords, these organs are used to produce different sounds. Sometimes the lips are rounded, sometimes spread, sometimes closed, the mouth and the jaws are opened partially and sometimes fully, and the tongue is moved at different places or remains neutral in the process. Lazy lip movements cause unintelligibility, a rigid jaw muffles the voice and an inactive tongue chokes it.

Like other parts of the body, speech organs need exercise. Some of these are given below:

- Fill your mouth with air, roll it from one side to another and then release it after some time.
- Touch the various parts of the mouth with the tip of the tongue.
- Open and close the mouth in quick succession.
- Move your jaw from side to side.
- To strengthen your throat muscles and vocal cords, roar like a lion 3 to 5 times and utter 'Om' 15 to 20 times.

If you devote daily about five minutes on doing such exercises, you would soon discover the rich variety and resources of your speech organs and would be able to use your voice with great effect. In public speaking you would find it easy to project your voice and in dyadic communication to manipulate it to your advantage.

→ Having looked at the nature and importance of voice, let us turn our attention to its characteristics, namely, **quality, volume, pace, pitch, pronunciation, and pause.**

**Quality** The term quality refers to those characteristics which distinguish one voice from the other. A voice with good quality sounds pleasant and causes a pleasurable sensation among the listeners. If the quality is bad, it may exercise a negative impact and even irritate the audience.

The quality of voice is determined by the resonating mechanism of the voice, that is, the shape and size of the throat, mouth and nose cavity, action of the vocal cords, size of the chest cavity, and the manner of using the resonating chambers. Some persons are gifted with pleasant and expressive voice. But all of us can improve the quality of our voice by sustained practice. We cannot, of course, change the physical features but certainly modify the manner of production of voice to make it more effective. The exercises mentioned earlier in this chapter can prove useful in cultivating a rich voice. Remember that a good voice denotes, to some extent, a well-balanced personality and is an asset both in social situations and professional settings.

A few common faults from which some people suffer are listed below. Check by recording and listening to your voice whether you have any such fault and if yes, make an all-out effort to overcome it.



1. **Throatiness**, which results from deep resonance in the throat.
2. **Breathiness**, which occurs because of the passage of too much air through the vocal cords.
3. **Nasalisation**, which is caused by releasing some air through the nose in the production of oral sounds.
4. **Harshness**, which results from inhibited flow of air from the vocal cords.
5. **Being muffled**, which is caused by the lazy movement of jaw, tongue and lip
6. **Hoarseness**, which is caused by the inflammation of larynx.

To get rid of the last one, you require medical advice but the first five problems can be overcome by determined and sustained efforts. Even persons of great renown such as Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill had to struggle hard to cultivate their voice to become great orators.

**Volume** Volume is the degree of loudness or softness of the voice. It is determined by the amplitude of the vibration of vocal cords. The range of volume, which differs from person to person, may be broadly divided into the following four levels:

- Very high (Level 1)
- High (Level 2) - large gr.
- Low (Level 3) - person to person gr.
- Very low (Level 4)

We generally keep our volume at level 2 while speaking to a large group (classroom lecture, oral presentation, etc.) and at level 3 while interacting with one person or a small group of persons. One speaks at level 1 in special situations such as calling somebody from a long distance, speaking in a fit of rage, etc. Level 4 is used when we talk to a person in a solemn gathering, or to somebody sitting or standing very close to us or when we want to confide a secret to somebody, and in other similar situations. But variations in the volume are made according to situations, whatever be the level. For speaking at a proper volume we have to take into account factors such as background noise level, the size and acoustics of the room, the number of listeners, the nature of material being presented, etc. Sometimes the volume is raised to attain a dramatic effect or to draw greater attention of the audience to a particular point. Similarly, a speaker may lower the volume to convey something special to the audience or sometimes to silence the private commentators in the audience.

While changing the volume, care should be taken to ensure that pitch and quality of the voice do not change. For example, while speaking at level 1 the voice would become harsh and grating if we change the pitch and quality as well; it is, therefore, necessary to control the volume in such a way that it remains clear and audible at all levels. If you speak louder than necessary, you may sound aggressive and boorish and if the volume is too low, you may give the impression of being nervous and timid. Adjusting the volume to the requirements of the situation is one of the qualities of an effective speaker. While speaking to a large group, observe specially the last row of listeners. If you find them leaning forward, looking puzzled or giving some other signs of strain, you should raise the volume. And if you find the front row listeners leaning backwards, looking dazed or irritated, you should lower the volume. Further, if the venue of your speech is open and uncovered, the volume has to be kept at a relatively higher level. And remember that controlled variation of the volume that we have just discussed is essential whether you speak with or without the aid of a mike.

**Pace** Pace refers to the speed at which a person speaks. It is determined by several factors such as the duration of sounds, the number of stressed syllables in the utterance, the number of words spoken



speech, as a general guideline, use pauses where these punctuation marks would have been put if the speech was written.

Pauses are also used for several other purposes such as the following:

- to emphasise a point;
- to dramatise an idea;
- to separate one unit of thought from the others;
- to signal the beginning of a speech;
- to signal the end of a speech; and
- to silence the private commentators, if any, among the audience.

All pauses should be spontaneous and neither too long nor too short. Proper timing of pauses is an indicator of confidence and self-control on the part of the speaker. If used effectively, they can help you gather your thoughts and move from one to the other besides enabling you choose the right words and construct proper sentences to express them. And to the listeners they can give time to grasp your ideas. If sometimes your pauses are long, do not panic. Nobody expects you to memorise the speech and deliver it in one continuous flow without any pause. Moreover, to a speaker, the length of a pause appears to be greater than it actually is. Take care not to vocalise your pauses to achieve these purposes. Avoid time-fillers such as um, eh, ah, etc., and expressions like Isn't it?, Got it, I mean, O.K., Well, You know, etc. Frequent use of speech mannerisms such as these can irritate the listeners and obstruct the smooth flow of communication.

### Proxemics (The Language of Space)

A systematic study of the use of space in face-to-face interactions is called Proxemics. Habitual use of space in a particular way reveals, to some extent, a person's personality. In the corporate world the use of space is an indicator of power and status. For example, when an employee interacts with his boss, the distance between them is more than what it is when an officer of equal rank talks to him. The office of senior officers is more spacious than that of junior officers. In formal discussions the space between any two interlocutors is likely to be more than that in informal discussions. Thus, space not only shows business/official relationships among employees but also the nature of interaction, that is, whether it is confidential or open and transparent.

In public speaking the space between you and the audience should be used to your advantage. You can make body movements more freely and expand your gestures. You may move closer to the audience when you answer a question, make an important point, emphasise an idea, or express agreement with somebody in the audience. But soon after do move to the original position. If you speak to a small group while sitting, you may lean a little to use the space available over the table. But this should be done in a subtle manner and that too only for short spells of time.

As in the use of body language, there are socio-cultural variations in the use of space. For example, in personal interaction, we Indians tend to stand closer to the other person. An American or an Englishman may feel embarrassed or even annoyed if you go too close to him while conversing. An intrusion into their personal territory is considered to be a sign of bad manners.

Space has been classified into the following four categories. The divisions are not rigid; they may vary according to circumstances.



**Intimate (or Private) Space** This zone extends from personal touch to one and a half feet. Within this zone interaction takes place among members of a family, lovers, spouses and close relatives. Others enter this zone only in special circumstances, such as to congratulate, to console or to share together a moment of excitement. The interaction is characterised by a handshake, a pat on the back, a hug, arms round the neck, engaging looks and intimate whispers. In business, intimate space is used for discussion of confidential matters and for taking significant decisions at the apex level.

**Personal Space** It stretches from one and a half feet to four feet. This zone is suitable for interaction among friends, colleagues and dyadic communication between employees. In business, this zone is also used for small group meetings and personal interviews. Since the listeners are close by, the discussion is often marked by warmth, friendliness, spontaneity and interpersonal fellowship.

**Social Space** This zone ranges from 4 feet to 12 feet. It is suitable for large group meetings, briefing sessions, large group interviews, etc. Because of the presence of a greater number of people, the discussion tends to be formal. It does, however, facilitate participation of more people in the discussion. That is why social space is most frequently used zone for group interactions in professional organisations. The decisions taken and the results arrived at in such interactions regulate the day-to-day working of the organisation and at the same time help it move in new directions for further development.

**Public Space** The range of this space is beyond 12 feet up to 30 feet or the auditory limit. If the audience is large and outside the natural hearing range, a microphone is used to amplify the voice of the speaker. Public space is used for conferences, conventions, public meetings, etc. Since the distance between the speaker and the audience is long, the participants are less involved in the event. The speaker finds it difficult to establish and maintain eye contact with the entire audience and is thus unable to get immediate feedback. That is why speech events in this situation are often used for dissemination of information of general interest and persuasion of people to a particular viewpoint or course of action.

## Chronemics (The Language of Time)

A study of time management and its role in communication is called chronemics. 'Time is money' is not a hollow statement. If you carefully observe how time matters in business relationships, you would realise the value of this statement. Unprecedented advances in information technology have greatly enhanced the importance and patterns of its utilisation in business organisations. Quick contact, immediate interaction and speedy transmission of messages characterise modern business transactions. No wonder the resultant oral work culture has greatly accelerated the pace of business and professional activities.

Today respect for others' time is a mark of professional etiquette. If you are punctual in performing your duties, arrive at meetings on time, complete your presentation within the allotted time, you would give a clear signal of being disciplined, well-organised and systematic in your approach to work. Those who talk more than necessary on phone, indulge in gossip at workplace, delay response or action required by them do not realise the value of time and this may prove detrimental to their professional growth and tarnish the image of the organisation to which they belong.

There are socio-cultural variations in the use of time as well. In the Western countries people are more time conscious than in India and some Latin countries. For example, the slightest delay in beginning a business meeting would meet with general disapproval in the U.K. and Germany whereas in India people may not mind a few minutes delay.