



## Significance of Nonverbal Communication and Paralinguistic Features in Communication: A Critical Analysis

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**Abstract:** *Non-verbal communication refers to the process of interaction without using written or spoken language. It is a process of sending and receiving wordless messages by means of facial expressions, gestures, postures, and other tones of voice. Non-verbal cues include all expressive signs and signals which are used to send and receive messages apart from manual sign language. In a communication situation, non-verbal code is as important as verbal code. Verbal content of a communication is only a part of it; the other part is communicated non-verbally. In a speaking-listening process/situation, words as well as associated gestures and facial expressions both help us in interpreting the meanings correctly. Paralanguage is the way we vocalize or say the words we speak. Here we mainly deal with the non-verbal sounds, pause and silence. Paralinguistic expressions can be included in non-verbal codes. These expressions give vitality, rhythm and make communication animated. Paralinguistic expressions vary in their interpretation from culture to culture. Paralinguistic expressions have three categories of vocalizations: Vocal characterizers (laughing, crying, yelling, whining and yawning etc.): vocal qualifiers (volume, pitch, rhythms, tone and rate): and vocal segregates (uh, hut, shh, ooh, mmh, huh, hmmm, ha). The fact of non-verbal sounds, which is often named "Vocal Paralanguage", includes such vocal elements as intonation, tone, pitch, rhythm, volume, pace/rate etc. These elements form a powerful, subtle and vital part of communication. Non-verbal sounds state a person's emotional expression and a person's characteristics. The present paper highlights the significance of non-verbal communication and paralinguistic features in the social and professional interaction.*

**Key Words:** *Paralinguistic, Non-Verbal, Communication, Body Language.*

*Communication is the transfer of information and understanding from one person to another person. It is a way of reaching others with facts, ideas, thoughts and values.*

**Keith Davis**

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

We provide and receive thousands of wordless messages everyday with the help of gestures without being aware of the non-verbal clues. Currently, the systematic study of non-verbal communication or kinesics has come into existence. Kinesics studies make an observation of real-world interaction rather than concentrating on scientific studies. The interpretation of body language on the basis of these studies has contributed substantially to communication. While interacting with people we involuntarily respond to various non-verbal codes. Non-verbal communication experts are of different opinion if the gestures are learned or instinctive. Paralinguistic feature plays a vital role for communication.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Desmond Morris in his book published in 1978, *Manwatching: A Field Guide to Human Behaviour* notes that human beings distinguish themselves from animals by 'thinking' and 'building'. Kinesics gestures or body language movements are 'built' and not always 'instinctive'- makes more sense if we agree with Morris's views. Desmond Morris's classification of non-verbal communication into five types: *Inborn, Discovered, Absorbed, Trained* and *Mixed* were accepted by many cultural anthropologists and can act as a standard classification. ***Inborn non-verbal signals*** are not explicitly taught. We know how to do them without being taught. We identify these signals when we watch them being informed. They are the same in all clusters of the world. Smiling, crying, frowning, facial-flushing, blinking, clearing throat etc. are all clearly inborn or innate and these signals signify the same attitudes and emotions in cultures all round the world. It is important to note that cultural factors may affect the gestures to some extent. An Indian may cry aloud whereas a British will sob softly. ***Discovered actions*** are adopted upon discovery. We discover easily some gestures and adopt them to our use in expression. Actions such as crossing legs, crossing arms and



kneeling are common across the cultures and easily learnt by us upon discovery. Discovered actions are hard to distinguish from inborn actions since they can be common to many cultures. Discovered actions occur in greater frequency. **Absorbed actions** are learnt from others. Normally, these signals are learnt from teachers, parents and other close relatives, elder siblings. They differ from culture to culture. Morris says that absorbed actions are passed from influential, powerful persons to non-influential persons. Winking, thumbs up, victory gestures are examples of absorbed action. Since absorbed actions are learnt from immediate environment, culture plays a big role here. Morris says, absorbed actions are culturally distinctive but not culturally mandated. **Trained actions** on the other hand are learnt and practised with a lot of deliberation and willingness. Most of the skills are learnt activity. They take longer period of time than absorbed actions. The best example of trained actions will be in the area of military persons. Military personnel are trained to develop such skills. Trained gestures are shared by people of a homogeneous group. For example, all trained school teachers will use similar non-verbal gestures while communicating with their students. 'Teachers behaviour', 'military walk' are examples of popular usages indicating trained non-verbal codes. **Mixed actions** are blend of innate and absorbed or learnt actions. Mixed actions originate inborn actions but absorb other signals as a result of association with other cultures and blend the two.

### 3. ANALYSIS:

Non-verbal communication has an important role in our interaction with people. Sometimes non-verbal behaviour or the "visible codes" represent the "true" characteristics, attitudes and emotions of humans better than verbal behaviour. Very often words can be deceptive but our innate non-verbal actions express our most secret feelings. Sigmund Freud once said: "He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore." Freud is exaggerating a little but the statement has truth in it. Very often we notice restless persons shake one or both legs. Albert Mehrabian in his book *Silent Messages* concludes through a series of experiments that in communication total impact:

7% verbal feeling  
28% vocal or verbal behaviour  
65 %non-verbal feeling

Though studies in this area are not in an advanced stage and the 'empirical' percentage may raise questions in our minds, but it shows a tendency to attach more meaning to the study of these 'visible codes' or non-verbal actions. Study of non-verbal communication, thus is important because of its multiple functions:

- it can make up for the deficiency in verbal communication
- it can compensate for an absence of command over the language
- it repeats what was said verbally
- it complements what was said verbally
- it can substitute for what would be said verbally
- it regulates and manages the communication event
- it helps in communication across cultures
- it supports other evidences, such as verbal message rather than as an indicator of mood or intention or its own
- it makes communication more effective and convincing
- word+ action combination is more reliable in meaning interpretation.

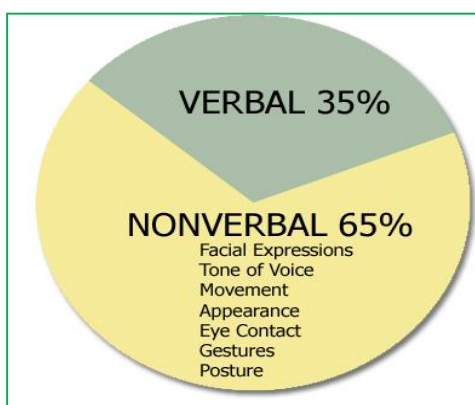


Figure 1



Non-verbal communication entails communicating by sending and receiving wordless messages. They usually reinforce verbal communication, though it can also stand alone and convey messages on its own. Majority of our communication is non-verbal. Body language is a non-verbal way of communication. Physical non-verbal communication, or body language, includes facial expressions, eye contact, body posture, gestures such as wave, pointed finger and the like, overall body movements, tone of voice, touch, and others. Body posture and physical contact convey a lot of information. Facial expressions are the most common among all nonverbal communication. For instance, a smile or a frown conveys distinct emotions hard to express through verbal communication. Folded arms and crossed legs are some of the symbols conveyed by a body posture. Physical contact, like, shaking hands, patting and touching expressions the feeling of intimacy. Facial expressions, gestures and eye contact are all different ways of communication. Reading facial expressions can help one understand a person better. Speech also contains nonverbal elements known as paralanguage. These include voice lessons like quality, emotion and speaking style as well as prosodic features such as stress, rhythm and intonation. Likewise, written texts include nonverbal elements such as handwriting style, spatial arrangement of words and the use of emotions to convey emotional expressions in pictorial form. There are some other forms of non-verbal communications which mainly communicate one's personality. They are aesthetic communication, appearance, space language and symbols. Aesthetic communication or creative expressions such as dancing, painting, singing, sculpting, music and others are also non-verbal communications which contributes to one's personality. Appearance or the mode of one's physical representation also contributes to communication. Space language such as paintings, landscapes and others communicate one's social status and taste. Symbols like that of religion or status also communicates a lot. Non-verbal communication involves those non-verbal stimuli in a communication settings that are generated by both the source (Speaker) and his or her use of the environment and that have potential message value for the source or receiver (Listener); (Samovar et al.). Basically it is sending and receiving messages in variety of ways without the use of verbal codes (Words). It is both intentional and unintentional. Broadly speaking, there are two basic categories of non-verbal language: on-verbal messages produced by the broad setting (time, space, silence).

It is also believed that non-verbal communication means face, action, tone, temperature, colour, odour, utensils, clothing, time, space and other means including the human body-related facial expressions, movements, etc; also known as body language. Thus, on-verbal communication is a wide scope, content appreciable cross –disciplinary academic research, in addition to facilitate the exchange of verbal communication that we cannot be called the non-verbal communication. There is a saying “*Action Speaks Louder than Words*”. Bovee, etal (2004) Stated: “People's action often do speak louder than their words. In fact, most people can deceive others much more easily with words than they can with their bodies. Words are relatively easy to control; body language, facial expressions, vocal characteristics are not. By paying attention to these, you can detect deception or affirm a speaker's honesty, because non-verbal communication is so reliable, people generally have more faith in non-verbal cues than they do in verbal message correctly, and you can interpret their underlying attitudes and intentions and respond appropriately”. Non-verbal communication has value in human interaction because it is usually responsible for first impressions. It is important to the study of intercultural communication because a great deal of non-verbal behaviour speaks a universal language. Behaviours such as smiling, crying, laughing, frowning, tend to have similar meanings, whether in India, America or any countries in Europe. The Dimensions of Non-verbal Communication are as follows:

- Used to **repeat** the verbal message (e.g. point in a direction while stating directions).
- Used to accent a verbal message. (e.g. verbal tone indicates the actual meaning)
- **Complete** the verbal message but also may contradict, e.g.; a NOD reinforces a positive message (among Americans); a “WINK” may contradict a stated positive message.
- Regulate interactions (non-verbal cues convey when the other person should speak or not)
- May Substitute for the verbal message (especially if it is blocked by nose, interruption, etc-i.e.; gestures (finger to lips to indicate need for quiet), facial expressions (i.e. a nod instead of a yes).

Now, one question raises Is Non-Verbal Communication Useful? The answer is definitely yes, it adds to the meaning of the verbal communication. It is also essential for the interaction of social and professional world:

- Non-verbal gestures represent ‘more true’ characteristics, attitudes, and feelings than verbal codes.
- Non-verbal gestures reinforce or flavour verbal gestures.
- Non-verbal cues reflect emotional attitude of people.
- Non-verbal gestures help us communicate with people whom we don't know or people from different cultures.

It is clear that visible code or non-verbal behaviour is as important as verbal code in any communication situation. Non-verbal behaviour provides much of the information which we process and utilize in our interactions. Secondly,



visible code differs from culture to culture and care should be taken to interpret non-verbal behaviour in cross-cultural contexts. The non verbal communication cues can play five roles which are quite adequate for our conversation. They are as mentioned below:

- **Repetition:** they can repeat the message the person is making verbally.
- **Contradiction:** they can contradict a message the individual is trying to convey.
- **Substitution:** they can substitute for a verbal message. For example, a person's eyes can often convey a far more vivid message than words.
- **Complementing:** they may add to or complement a verbal message. A boss who pats a person on the back in addition to giving praise can increase the impact of the message.
- **Accenting:** they may accent or underline a verbal message. Pounding the table, for example, can underline a message.

To analyze the non verbal communication we may categorize them in the following manners. Communication is transferring information between one person and another. Non verbal communication can be divided into four categories: *aesthetic, physical, signs, and symbols*. Following is an explanation and examples of non verbal communication.

- Aesthetic communication occurs through creative expression. This would include all the arts: music, dance, theatre, crafts, art, painting, and sculpture. Ballet is a great example of this, as there is dance and music, but no spoken or sung words. Even in an opera, where there are words, there are still facial expressions, costumes, posture, and gestures.
- Physical communication covers the personal kind of communication, and includes a smile or frown, wink, touch, smell, salute, gesture, and other bodily movements. Social conversation uses a lot of these physical signals along with the spoken words.
- Signs are a more mechanical kind of non verbal communication, which includes signal flags or lights, a 21 gun salute, a display of airplanes in formation, horns, and sirens.
- Symbols of communication are used for religious or personal status reasons, as well as to build self esteem. This includes jewellery, cars, clothing, and other things to communicate social status, financial means, influence, or religion.

Bi Jiwan proposes non-verbal communication can be divided into four categories such as:

- **Body language** including basic stance (body posture and potential), the basic protocol actions (such as shaking hands, smiling, body touch) as well as the various parts of the body movements (such as the head, leg movements etc).
- **Vice language**, also known as class language or with language mainly including silence, then rotate access and non-semantic sound (pronounced organ non-verbal sounds, non-vocal organs non-verbal sounds)
- **The object of language** including cosmetics, modified materials, clothes, furniture and other durable goods.
- **Environmental language**, the study is that people created for themselves the impact of environment on communication, rather than the role of the natural environment. Environment, language including time, spatial information (such as overcrowding, nearly physical distance, the concept of territories, spatial orientation, seating, etc.) colour, sound, lighting, marking, architectural design, and interior decoration.

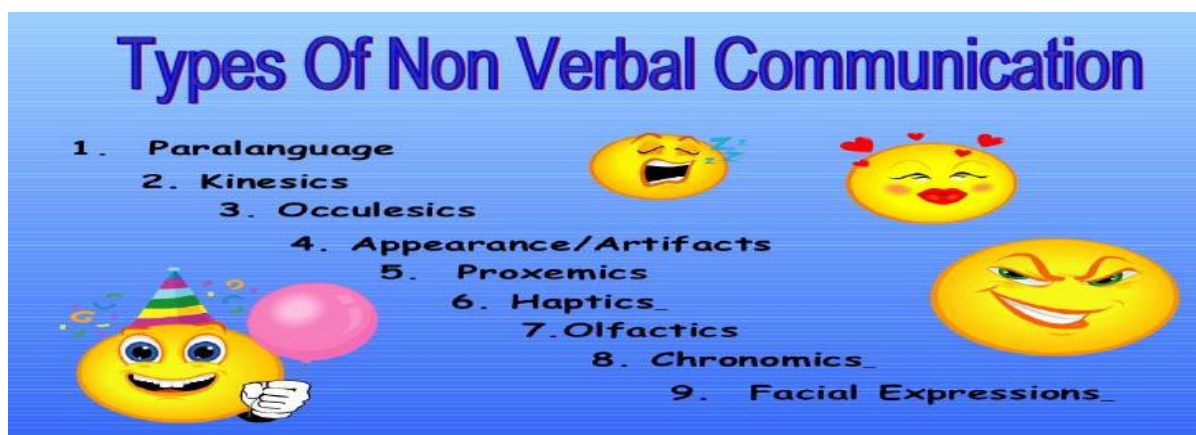


Figure 2



### Application of Non-Verbal Communication

1. Kinesics
2. Facial Expression
3. Oculistics (*Study on Eye Contact*)
4. Gestures:
5. Postures
6. Haptics (*Study on Touch*)
7. Proxemics (*Spatial Language*)
8. Chronemics (*Time Language*)
9. Paralanguage
10. Non-Verbal Sounds
11. Pause and Silence

### Paralanguage:

Paralanguage, also known as vocalics, is a component of meta-communication that may modify meaning, give nuanced meaning, or convey emotion, by using techniques such as prosody, pitch, volume, intonation etc. It is sometimes defined as relating to nonphonetic properties only. Paralanguage may be consciously or unconsciously. The study of paralanguage is known as paralinguistics and was invented by George L. Trager in the 1950s, while he was working at the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. Department of state. A gasp is a kind of paralinguistic respiration in the form of a sudden and sharp inhalation of air through the mouth. A sigh is a kind of paralinguistic respiration in the form of a deep and especially audible, single exhalation of air out of the mouth or nose that humans use to communicate emotion. Moaning and groaning both refer to an extended guttural sounds emanating from the throat, which typically indicate displeasure, and are made by humans beginning in infancy. Clearing throat is a metamessaging nonverbal form of communication used in announcing one's presence upon entering the room or approaching a group. It is done by individuals who perceive themselves to be of higher rank than the group they are approaching and utilize the throat-clear as a form of communicating this perception to others. The throat-clear is also used to convey nonverbalized disapproval. Mhm is between a literal language and movement, by making a noise "hmm" or "mhm", to make a pause for the conversation or as a chance to stop and think. "Huh?" meaning "what? (that is, used when an utterance by another is not fully heard or requires clarification), is an essentially universal expression, but may be a normal word (learned like other words) and not paralanguage. If it is a word, it is a rare (or possibly even unique) one, being found with basically the same sound and meaning in almost all languages. Pause and Silence: Silence sends non-verbal cues during a communication situation. Meaning assigned to silence is contingent on such factors as duration, appropriateness, preceding behavior or activity and relationship between participants. Like other non-verbal behavior, our use of and reaction to silence is culturally determined. Many Eastern cultures use silence as a common and preferred form of communication. Some Western cultures see silence as non functional and prefer continuous verbalization during interaction. Traditionally, silence has been defined as negatively as merely the absence of speech. Silence is a strong conversational and expressive resource. To some extent, pause is a kind of silence. Much of the time, brief silence or pauses and longer silence assume the function of emphasis for spoken language. Silences of any duration may draw our attention, and sometimes pauses or lengthy silences may become the foreground. Silence then becomes the medium for conveying There is a saying 'silence is gold and speech is silver.

### Kinesics:

Kinesics is the name given to the study of the body communicates without words i.e.; through various movements of its parts. People smile; nod and pat that indicates praise, while frown, head shaking and confusing look can mean "no". Here we would like to look into some of the more significant movements and kinesics from these parts in great details. They are facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, postures as well as touch of teachers.

#### ➤ Oculistics (eye contact):

Eye contact is another important aspect of kinesics. There is a saying "The eyes are the window of the soul". The use of eye contact as an avenue of communication is relatively obvious. There are two kinds of eye contact one is looking around, which plays a very useful role. Another kind of eye contact is looking attentively or gaze.

### Appearance/Artifacts:

Communicate	Social status/membership
Marital status	Personality
Economic status	

*Artifact* is a combination of two Latin words, *arte*, meaning "by skill" and *factum* which means "to make." Usually when you use the word *artifact*, you are describing something crafted that was used for a particular purpose during a much earlier time.

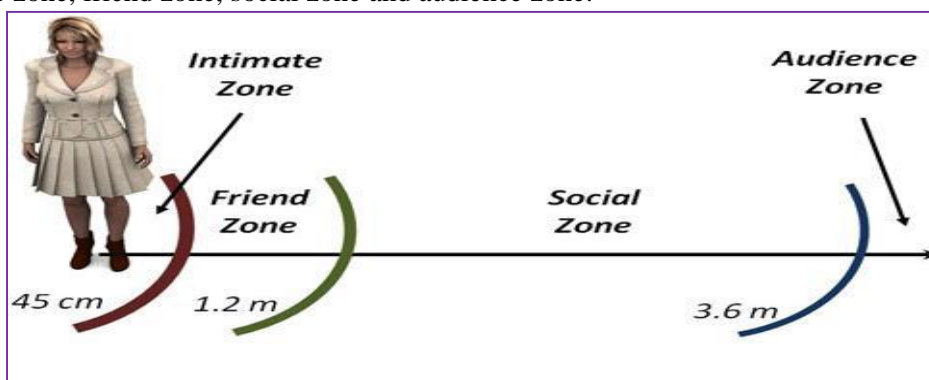


**Clothing, artifacts, living environments:**

The "material culture," that is, how we live, what we carry with us, and how we dress have been traditional focuses of anthropology and ethnology. Increasingly, however, attention has been paid to these issues also in intercultural communication, and related areas such as intercultural marketing. The cultural meaning of colours, and the change of meanings within a culture, for instance, has been studied from marketing point of view. Red has been traditionally one of the favourite colours in Chinese culture because the colour represents happiness and wealth. While black in earlier years had not enjoyed popularity among Chinese, today that colour, particularly glossy and brilliant black, has turned out to be a colour of luxury. White used to be the colour of sorrow in China; today, brides dress in white for their weddings. Yet the traditional red might still be present in various shades in decorations, or even as an additional wedding dress to be changed into later during the festivities.

**Proxemics (Spatial Language):**

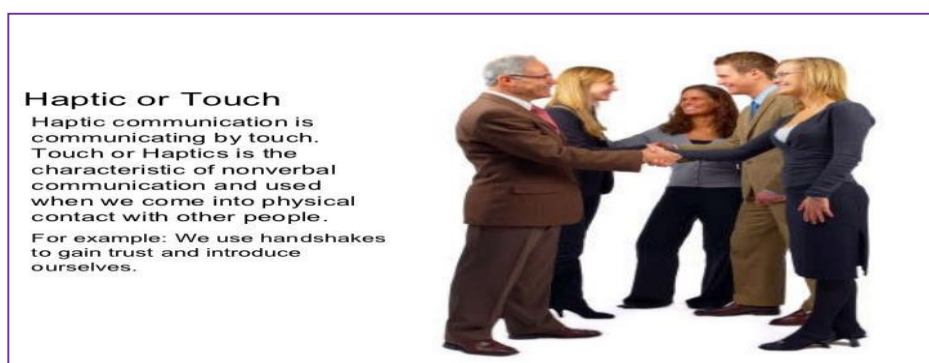
Space here refers to the distance between one individual to other. There are four types of zones as per the distance: intimate zone, friend zone, social zone and audience zone.



**Figure 3**

**Haptics (Touch):**

For visually challenged and hearing impaired people, touch is the principle means of communication.



**Figure 4**

We know that a slap on the back can mean a touch of friendship or a sign of encouragement and that stroking a dog or a cat conveys affection. Physical touch always communicates messages, especially emotional ones. Greetings and departures between friends and loved ones often involve touch in one way or another. Touch is also an efficient way of breaking down communication barriers. A full embrace, a stroke of the face are ways of showing our love, and hand shaking can also easily make two strangers familiar to each other on their first meeting. As the most extreme reduction of individual distance, touch is one of our most ancient and sensitive ways of relating to others and plays a significant role in giving encouragement, expressing tenderness and showing emotional supports. Appropriate body contact means calmness, belief and favour. The shoulder and arm are the most acceptable body areas to be touched, especially for older girls. Back, head and hands are intermediate areas.

**Olfactics:** The study of smells and how they are perceived are called olfactics. We can predict many things by smelling.



### Chronemics (Time Language):

Chronemics is the study of how human beings communicate through their use of time. In professional world, time is valuable commodity. When you are late for an appointment, people react negatively. If you arrive early, you are considered over-eager or aggressive. So, always be on time. Through time, you communicate both subtly and explicitly.

### Facial Expression:

The face is the most expressive part of the body. People get information about the type of the person, personality traits from face. There is a saying "Face is the index of life".

### Postures:

Postures generally refers to the way we hold ourselves when we stand, sit or walk. Truly speaking what one speaks is very important but what you do just before you begin and after you have finished is equally important. Standing or sitting in relaxing professional manner, is a positive posture.

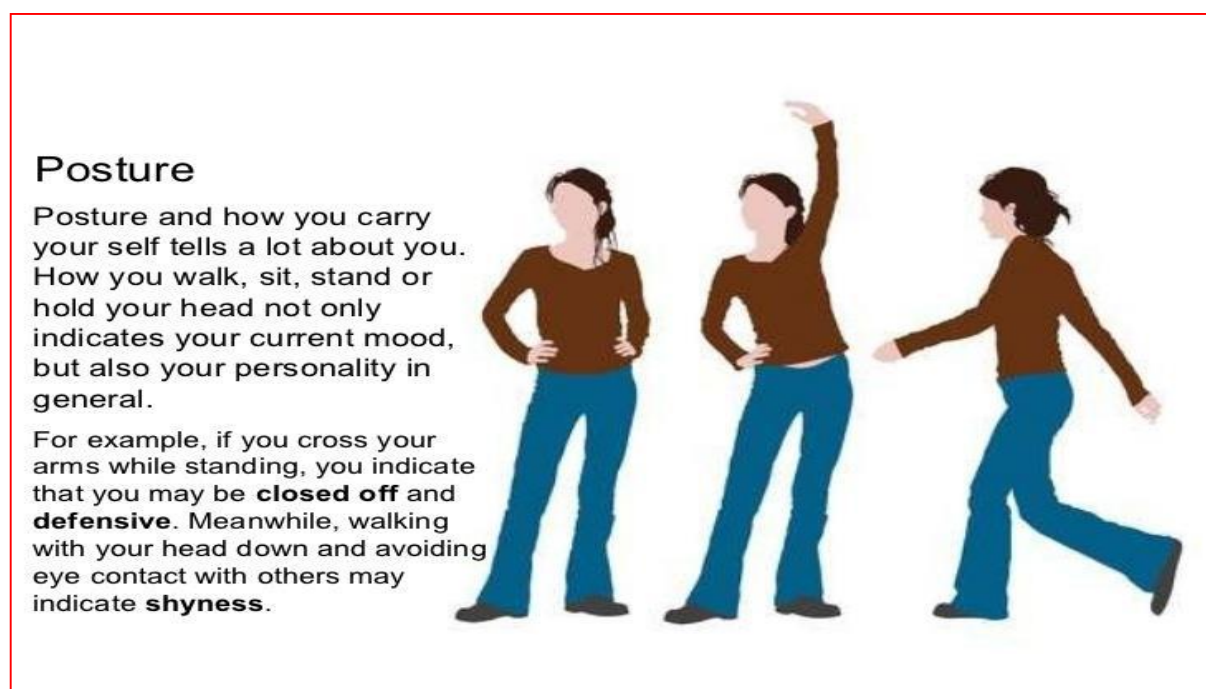


Figure 5

### Gestures:

Gestures are the movement made by hands, arms, shoulders, head and torso. A well-timed gesture not only drives a point home, but also enhances impact and adds greater value to what is being said. Gestures clarify our ideas or reinforce them and should be well suited to the audience and occasion. It should not divert the attention of the listener and distract from our message. Our gesture should be quite natural and spontaneous. Gesture can occur with or without speech. Some gestures are spontaneous; some are highly ritualized and have very special meanings. In other words, gestures are closely related to speech, illustrating or supplementing it. Generally speaking, a speaker uses gestures for two purposes: to reinforce an idea or to help describe something.

### How to improve your non-verbal communication skills

- Be honest, especially when communicating emotions
- Use a firm, friendly handshake
- Maintain eye contact
- Reinforce your words with tone and gestures
- Be aware of your posture
- Use appropriate gestures to support your points
- Imitate the posture and appearance people you want to impress
- Show respect for speakers and listeners
- Touch people only when appropriate and acceptable
- Smile genuinely, as a fake one will be obvious



In addition to these, nonverbal communication can also be studied on the basis of visual and auditory manners. Different colours represent different meanings. Colours are association with different moods and feelings.

Colour	Message
White	Peace, purity
Red	Danger, excitement
Black	Death, sorrow
Blue	Sincerity, passion
Green	Life, freshness
Pink	Feminist, grace
Purple	High rank, tradition
Yellow	Cheerfulness, vigour
Gray	Wisdom, confidence

Besides, there are also other meanings:

- **Yellow** – warm, exciting, happy
- **Blue** – deep, peaceful, supernatural
- **Green** – peace, stillness, nature
- **White** – harmony, silence, cleanliness
- **Black** – grief, dark, unknown
- **Red** – glowing, confidence, alive
- **Orange** – radiant, healthy, serious
- Colour has Cultural Significance
- In western cultures black is a colour of mourning
- In Japan however it is a colour of honour, with white the colour of mourning
- Red in the west represents danger, love, passion
- In India it is a colour of purity, in China it is a colour of good luck and in South Africa it is a colour of mourning
- Yellow represents courage in Japan, mourning in Egypt and hope in the West
- Religion can be Linked to Colours
- Green is considered to be the holy colour of Islam
- Judaism is represented by the colour yellow
- In Hinduism, many gods have blue skin
- White is linked to peace across many religions

In visual, we can only predict varieties meanings out of maps, charts, diagrams, pie chart. The daily weather report is displayed in the TV screen by different bar diagrams. The traffic signals are also the best example of visual communication.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS:

Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in our lives, as it can improve a person's ability to relate, engage, and establish meaningful interactions in everyday life. A better understanding of this type of communication may lead people to develop stronger relationships with others. Paralinguistic cues are an important component of communication that can enhance or alter the meaning of verbal communication. Paralinguistic devices such as facial expression, body language, tone, and gestures, help convey meaning. Paralanguage makes the language communication to be more accurate, vividly and full of expressive force. It plays the role of make the words significance determined, beautification, substitution and deepened.

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