

# **NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

## **The Potent Hidden Language**

### **Objectives**

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

1. define the term “nonverbal communication” and related concepts;
2. explain the nature of nonverbal behaviors;
3. illustrate nonverbal behaviors;
4. differentiate the three primary elements of nonverbal communication;
5. identify categories/dimensions of nonverbal behaviors;
6. analyze the supportive function of nonverbal behaviors; and
7. synthesize the universal elements of nonverbal communication.

# INTRODUCTION

Edward Hall is quoted in Mark L. Knapp's book (1972) as saying: "Those of us who keep our eyes open can read volumes into what we see going on around us." Likewise, we can add: Those of us who keep our ears open can hear tones from the voices and sounds resonating around us.

If many of us heretofore thought that we could communicate effectively by just using our ears to listen to the words or sentences uttered by another, this chapter teaches us there's more to human communication than reaches the ear. Concepts like kinesics, paralanguage and proxemics among others will guide oral communicators to attain a more attentive posture, a refinement of our communication stance, so to speak.

But first, *what is nonverbal communication?* Ruesch and Kees (1956) took the point of view that if words are neither written nor spoken, they are nonverbal in nature. All those nuances which surround or accompany words, such as tone of voice, pitch range, articulation control, fall under this definition of nonverbal or what is frequently termed paralanguage. A simple definition is given by social psychologists Vaughan & Hogg (1998), thus: "nonverbal communication is the transfer of meaningful information from one person to another by means other than written or spoken language."

## CATEGORIES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

What then are the primary elements of nonverbal communication? Nonverbal forms can be broadly categorized, thus:

***Sign language*** which includes all those codes in which numbers, words, and punctuation signs have been supplanted or replaced by gestures, e.g., from a simple hitchhiker's "thumb-up" gesture to such complete codes like the language of the deaf.

***Action language*** encompasses all movements that are not used exclusively as signals. Walking and drinking, for instance, serve a dual function. They can serve personal needs as well as make statements to those who perceive them.

***Object language*** embraces all intentional and non-intentional display of material things, such as art objects, implements, machines, architectural structures, and the human body and whatever clothes it.

## DIMENSIONS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

What dimensions of nonverbal communication are evidenced by studies in the field? Knapp (1972:5) enumerates seven dimensions, as follows:

1. body motion or *kinesics*
2. physical characteristics
3. touching behavior or *haptics*
4. paralanguage
5. *proxemics*
6. artifacts
7. environmental factors

Joseph de Vito (1986) presents a slightly different typology than the one above. He classifies nonverbal communication into:

1. body communication
  - gestural communication
  - facial communication
  - eye communication
  - touch communication
2. space communication
  - proxemics
  - territoriality
  - aesthetics and colors
3. silence, paralanguage, and temporal communication
  - silence
  - paralanguage
  - time

Other classification schemes would include olfactory communication as well as gustatory communication. With time this listing could expand. But how important are these concepts to human communication? Why should we all be concerned with nonverbal communication?

## **PRINCIPLES OF NONVERBAL MESSAGES**

Let us therefore examine certain principles that underlie nonverbal messages. De Vito (1986) outlines seven universals pertinent to nonverbal communication:

### ***1. Nonverbal communication, like verbal communication, is contextual.***

Take away its context or a circumstance, a given nonverbal act is undecipherable. A mother's tears at her daughter's wedding would mean something different from a mother's tears upon hearing the news of her son's death. At times, though, given the full details of the context, we may still be unable to decode nonverbals. Like good communication, it takes practice or exposure.

### ***2. Nonverbal behaviors are wholes not parts or segments.***

Movements involving use of the hands, eyes, or muscular tone occur in packages or clusters where all parts of the human body work together to express a particular meaning. When various verbal and nonverbal behaviors reinforce or build on each other, the condition called congruence results. For instance, when you scream in fear your body parts are all in unison to communicate said emotion. It cannot happen that only your eyes mirror fear and the rest of your body does not.

And since nonverbal behaviors are accompanied by verbal messages, we take notice when contradictory messages are sent. We may conclude that a man does not mean his verbal compliment to a lady when he mumbles while looking at her with a half-turned body.

### ***3. Nonverbal behaviors always communicate.***

Regardless of what one does or does not do, his/her nonverbal behavior always says something to someone. If a student were feeling bored in class but did not particularly want his teacher to notice such state, he would look out the window more often than not, slouch in his chair, or pretend to be writing down notes. Or his mere silence or non-participation in the discussion would communicate this boredom. But sitting silently may have two angles, a negative and a positive nonverbal. Altogether, it is impossible to not communicate.

### ***4. Nonverbal communication follows certain rules.***

How did you learn to bow before your elders? And what about shaking hands with others? Certainly, you didn't read protocols appearing in a Manual of Community Behavior because you learned the rules of nonverbal behavior by observing your parents, teachers, elders and other adults. For instance, touching among females is governed by a set of rules different from that of males. Likewise, sitting behavior between the sexes is differentiated by rules. In the first example, you learn that women may hold hands in public or walk arm in arm or even do prolonged hugging; if you see the same behavior among males, you might raise an eyebrow or utter a comment of disapproval. In the second instance, you observe that females usually sit with their legs closed while men sit with their legs open.

### ***5. Nonverbal communication is motivated.***

A smile observed or received by a person may mean many things to him/her but these meanings would generally be positive or pleasant. A negative emotional state or condition would commonly motivate a frown. Like verbal messages, nonverbal messages are motivated in some way. Meanings of a smile or frown reside in the source as well, and the giver's motivation is privy to him. But it is presumptuous to think that one can learn a person's motives by merely observing and analyzing his/her nonverbal behaviors. It is not possible to tell what's going on inside a person just by looking closely at his nonverbals.

### ***6. Nonverbal behavior is more credible than verbal behavior.***

When nonverbal behavior contradicts or opposes verbal behavior, we tend to rely more on nonverbal behavior. For instance, when someone is lying but says, "It's true, I swear!" you would not believe him because you see that he has no direct eye contact with you. The alleged liar's eyes are trained towards a distance somewhere to your left or right. If there is eye contact, his voice will likely give him away for lack of sincerity or conviction. When Albert Mehrabian (1968) and his colleagues studied the emotional impact of messages (i.e., expression of feelings), they came up with the following formula:

$$\text{Total impact} = .07 \text{ verbal} + .38 \text{ vocal} + .55 \text{ facial}$$

Although the research pertained only to messages that expressed feelings, it is interesting to note the very slight contribution of the "verbal" to total impact of the message. Are nonverbals more credible because people learn them subconsciously? Or is it because verbals are easier to fake than nonverbals?

### ***7. Nonverbal communication often refers to other communications.***

It is often *metacommunicational* because it goes beyond the verbal messages and comments on them, on how the communicator is sending out these verbal messages. For instance, on the first day of classes, a teacher walks in, introduces herself, explains the syllabus, and asks for reactions, comments, or questions. The class listens to her verbal messages but is also listening to certain nonverbals concerning her uncombed hair, slightly stooped shoulders, and very slow manner of speaking. Certain mental conclusions are made probably on how boring the class might be. Thus, frequently, nonverbal behavior serves a *metacommunication function*, either to reinforce or contradict other verbal or nonverbal messages.

The following table sums up the universality of nonverbal behavior:

**Table 1: Joseph de Vito's *Universals of Nonverbal Messages***

<b>Nonverbal Universal</b>	<b>Principle</b>
Contextual Packaged	Nonverbal communication cannot be isolated from its context. Nonverbal behaviors occur in clusters; usually consistent with other nonverbal and verbal messages
Communicative	All nonverbal behaviors send a message.
Rule-governed	It follows rules embedded in culture.
Motivated Credible	All nonverbal behaviors occur with some reason, identifiable or not. Nonverbal cues are more highly believable than verbal ones. {see Shapiro study, 1968}
Metacommunicational	It refers or comments on verbal and other nonverbal messages, by reinforcing or contradicting.

## **CATEGORIES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

With the above precepts or rules to give us a deeper understanding of what nonverbal communication is, let us look at its categories and their definitions and examples.

### **1. *Body Motion or Kinesic Behavior (moving or dynamic)***

Ekman and Friesen (1969) systematized the vast array of nonverbal behavioral acts into:

**a) *Emblems*** – These are nonverbal acts which correspond to a direct verbal translation or dictionary definition. These are gestures like the “Peace” sign or “A-OK” or “time’s up” and which are strongly shared by members of a culture or subculture. Emblems are commonly used to communicate when verbal channels are blocked or when they fail. Other examples of emblems are:

- sign language used among the deaf
- TV crewmen’s signals

- motions or gestures of two people at a distance

- b) Illustrators** – Serving to illustrate what is said verbally, these are nonverbal acts that accompany speech. They are movements that accent, stress or emphasize a phrase or word; movements which sketch a path or direction that a thought takes; movements that depict a spatial relationship; or movements that depict bodily action. We are aware of them but not as explicitly as emblems. We learn them by imitating others but not as deliberately as emblems.
- c) Affect Displays** – Verbal effective statements or messages can be repeated, augmented, contradicted by, or unrelated to these facial configurations. Often, affective displays are not intended to communicate, but they could be done intentionally.
- d) Regulators** – Consisting mainly of head nods and eye movements, these nonverbal acts serve to maintain and regulate the back-and-forth nature of speaking and listening between two or more communicators (interactants). They tell the one speaking to hurry up, continue, repeat, elaborate, give the other a chance, or be more interesting. The verbal “*mm-hmm*” would be the equivalent of the head nod. These are like habits so internalized that they occur almost involuntarily.
- e) Adaptors** – These are nonverbal behaviors most difficult to define because they are believed to have been first learned during a given situation with conditions that triggered them. For instance, leg shaking among males or females (a few) may have started in anxiety conditions where the persons shook their legs or hands to escape from the interaction. Many nonverbal acts started and developed in childhood mainly to satisfy needs, perform actions, manage emotions, or develop social contacts. We are generally unaware of adaptors.

## 2. **Physical Characteristics (non-moving or static)**

These influential nonverbal cues emanate from physique or body shape, general attractiveness, body or breath odors, height, weight, hair, and skin tone or color.

## 3. **Touching Behavior (Haptics)**

Touch is an important if not crucial factor to child development. Touching behavior among adults is likewise considered important. Touch conveys a whole array of emotions or affective states. Some categories may include the following: stroking, patting, hitting, greetings and farewell, kissing, hugging, holding, guiding another’s movements, and a host of others.

## 4. **Paralanguage**

Knapp simply puts it as a concept that deals with “how something is said and not what is said.” Paralanguage has essentially two components (Traeger, 1958):

- a) **Voice Qualities** – Qualities like pitch range, pitch control, rhythm control, tempo, articulation control, resonance, glottis control, and vocal lip control are included here.
- b) **Vocalizations** – Vocal characterizers, qualifiers, segregates
  - Vocal characterizers. This includes such things as laughing, crying, sighing, yawning, belching, swallowing, heavy inhaling or exhaling, coughing, clearing of throat, hiccupping, moaning, groaning, whining, veiling, whispering, sneezing, snoring, stretching, grunting, and many others.

- Vocal qualifiers. This includes intensity (too loud to too soft), pitch height (too high to too low), and extent (extreme drawl to extreme clipping).
- Vocal segregates. These are such things as *uh-huh*, *um*, *amm*, *ah*, and other forms thereof

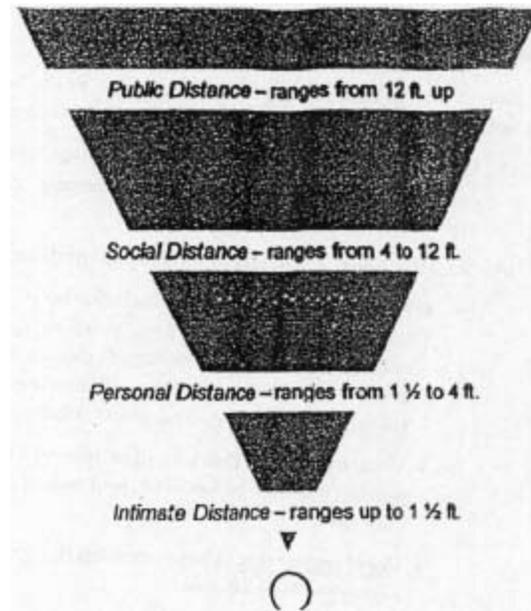
Included also under this category would be: silent pauses (beyond junctures), intruding or interrupting sounds, speech errors, and others.

## 5. Proxemics

This is the study of how man uses his personal and social space in relation to others. One facet of this study is called *small group ecology* whose concern it is to study how people respond to spatial relationships in informal and formal settings. Such studies consider seating arrangements, spatial arrangements related to leadership, communication flow, and the task at hand. Architects and builders study what features to build into residential communities because of proxemic behavior. Spatial relationships in crowds and dense populations are likewise studied. Man's personal space is studied in the context of conversational distance. Territoriality deals with man's personal, untouchable space or turf—similar to animals. Between two or more persons talking, distance ranges from intimate to social. Speakers in many public speaking situations talk across what Edward T. Hall terms as “public distance.”

The following is a classification of interhuman distance according to Gronbeck, Monroe et al (1994):

- Intimate distance: ranges up to 1 1/2 ft.
- Personal distance: ranges from 1 1/2 to 4 ft.
- Social distance: ranges 4 to 12 ft.
- Public distance: ranges from 12 feet up



## 5. Artifacts

These are objects or things in contact with the interactants that may serve as nonverbal stimuli. Perfume or scent clothes, bags, shoes, wigs or hairpieces, lipstick, eye glasses, false eyelashes, other beauty aids are included in this category.

## 7. *Environmental Factors*

These are elements in the surroundings that impinge on the human relationship but are not directly a part of it. Included here are furniture, architectural style, interior décor, lighting, smells, colors, temperature, noise or music, and such conditions where interaction occurs. Traces of action belong to this category as well. For instance, you may see cigarette butts, bits of torn paper, or fruit peels lying or strewn somewhere and this scene may precede your interaction with another.

## **FUNCTIONS NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

At this juncture, it is useful to repeat the notion of interrelationship or interrelatedness between verbal and nonverbal behavior. Nonverbal communication occurs in the context of verbal communication. So how do nonverbal behaviors support verbal behaviors?

### 1. *Repeating*

Nonverbal communication simply repeats what was said verbally. “Yes, yes!” can be accompanied by a head nod or a “no-no” by a head shake. These are repetition of the verbal message.

### 2. *Contradicting*

Nonverbal messages or cues are usually consistent with verbal messages. But at times nonverbal behavior contradicts or opposes verbal behavior. For instance, a parent says to a child, “I do love you,” but a big frown casts his countenance in doubt over his endearing message. Some nonverbal behaviors can be faked but not all. Others are harder to make a show of. The Shapiro study challenged “reliance on nonverbal cues in contradictory situations” by presenting findings where respondents were extremely consistent in their reliance on either linguistic cues or facial cues when asked to select the affect being communicated from a list of incongruent facial expressions and written messages.

### 3. *Substituting*

Nonverbal behavior can alternate for verbal behavior. Instead of saying, “I flunked my Math exam,” the student’s wry face can substitute for the verbal message. Or a widow’s sad mien can express the message “I’ve just lost my husband.”

### 4. *Complementing*

Nonverbal behavior serves to modify or elaborate on verbal messages. When a teenaged son faces his angry father because he came home from last night’s party with a dented fender, his muscle tone tenses up, his jaw drops, and his grip on the car key tightens. But all this changes into a relaxed posture or stance when he hears he is forgiven. Complementing behavior signals one’s attitudes and intentions toward another person.

### 5. *Accenting*

Behavior of the head or hands usually serves to stress, emphasize or make a verbal point stronger. Extreme cases can exhibit the nonverbal behavior of foot thumping. Ekman (1964) found that the face mainly exhibits emotions, but the body carries the most accurate indicators of the level of arousal or intensity.

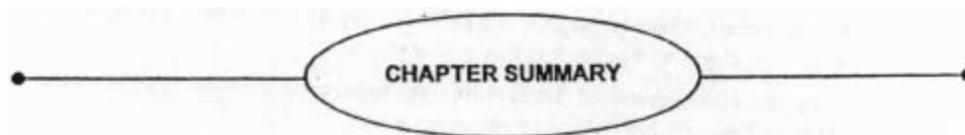
## 5. *Relating and regulating*

These are nonverbal behaviors that maintain and control or regulate the communication flow between two or more persons. A slight nod of the head may mean “Go on,” to (he other person talking; a shift in sitting position may signal “Be more interesting!” or an upraised index finger may say “I want to say something too.”

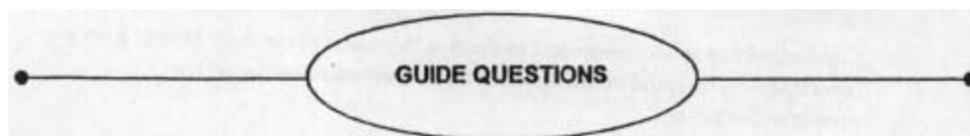
By sheer magnitude of nonverbal communication in the daily life of humans, its importance cannot be relegated to the background. It needs to be understood and appreciated in relation to verbal communication. Birdwhistell, a noted authority on nonverbal behavior makes the following estimates:

- a) the average person speaks words for a total of 10 to 11 minutes daily, the standard spoken sentence taking only about 2.5 seconds;
- b) less than 35% is carried by the verbal component in a conversation of two persons, the 65% plus being carried on the nonverbal band.

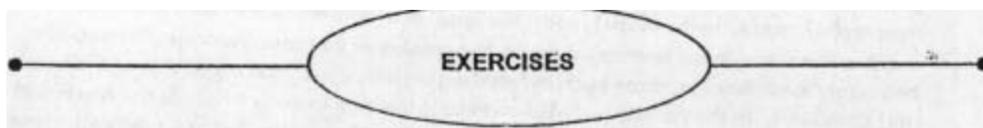
Social psychologist Edward T. Hall outlined 10 different kinds of human activity, which he called “primary message systems” but only one of them is language.



Nonverbal communication is the meaningful exchange between two or more persons by means other than written or spoken language. Paralanguage consists of all those nuances that accompany the spoken message, such as pitch control, articulation control, tone and volume of voice, and others. The universals of nonverbal behavior are: they are contextual; they are packaged; they are rule-governed; they are communicated; they are motivated; they are credible; they are metacommunicational. The dimensions of nonverbal behavior are: body motion or kinesics, physical characteristics, touching behavior or haptics, paralanguage, proxemics, artifacts, and environmental factors. The supportive function of nonverbal behaviors consists in: repeating, contradicting, substituting, complementing, accenting, relating and regulating verbal communication.

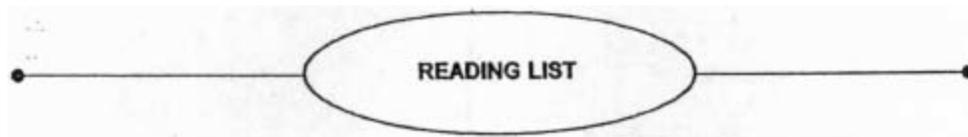


1. What do you notice about the nonverbal behaviors of people in varying degrees of intimacy or relationship? Describe them in detail.
2. Between introverts and extroverts, are there differences in their proxemics? What could the reasons be for sure differences?
3. Why is there complementarity of relationship between verbal and nonverbal behavior?
4. Could you describe the behaviors of children and adults who were deprived of touch in their developmental stages? How would this affect their communicative abilities?



EXERCISES

1. Choose two clusters to sit up front: one group of male students, another group of females. The rest will observe the two groups for a minute then verbally comment on their nonverbals. After description, the class will interact by applying which universals were obtaining in the situation.
2. Draw a rough figure of the human body. Indicate the nonverbal behaviors or gestures or actions opposite the head (face), the torso, the legs, the feet, and so on. This exercise should look closely at Filipino nonverbal behaviors.
3. A related project: Members of groups will combine, collate, synthesize their Filipino nonverbals and discuss the salient features of such by means of a group presentation.



READING LIST

- Gronbeck, McKerrow, Ehninger & Monroe. *Principles and Types of Speech Communication* (12<sup>th</sup> ed. New York New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994
- DeVito, Joseph A. *The Interpersonal Communication Book* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, New York: R.R. Donnellev & Sons Company, 1986.
- Knapp, Mark L. *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Inc., 1972.
- Vaughan, Graham M. and Michael A. Hogg. *Introduction to Social Psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Sydney, Australia: Prentice Hall. 1998.
- Civikly, Jean M. *Contexts of Communication* (ed.). Montreal, Canada: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 1981.
- Ayong, Juris Iris M. An Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis titled: "Verbal and Nonverbal Cues and the Divinator's Adaptive Strategies," University of the Philippines. Diliman, Quezon City, 2001.
- Trent, Judith S. *Communication: Views from the Helm for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (ed.). Needham, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1998.