

3.2 Non-verbal Language

We generally believe that communication is not possible without spoken or written symbols, but non-verbal language plays a vital role in the process of communication. The studies reveal that, in our social and professional life, we use non-verbal language more than verbal language. It includes:

3.2.1 Body Language

Human body plays an important role in the process of communication. All the body movements, such as expressions, gestures, postures etc., are guided by our feelings and thought processes. The movement of different body parts, such as hands, feet, eyes, shoulders, head etc., express the feelings and emotions of a person. All the body movements act as symbols and contribute to the meaning of a message. For instance, nodding head up and down conveys agreement; shaking head from side to side means disagreement; movement of hand is a mark of greeting. This movement forms a language which is known as body language. It is a prominent and an important medium of non-

verbal communication. An intelligent observer can understand this language easily. It can be learnt consciously as well as unconsciously.

Kinesics

A speaker conveys messages not only through spoken words, but also communicates through body movements. S/he uses different parts of her/his body to transmit the message which can include the head, face, eyes, shoulders and hands. This transmission is made sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously because the body conveys the message, mood and attitude of a person in the same way as a language uses the sets of signs and symbols to convey a message. Many-a-times, the body begins to speak even before the speaker starts speaking. The way in which the speaker stands, walks, moves hands, holds the manuscript is noticed by the audience and gather impressions. As it is essential for a speaker to pay attention to the body movements, it is equally important for the audience to learn and interpret the intricacies of body movements. The study of non-verbal behaviour of body movements, that forms a part of non-verbal communication, is known as Kinesics. It includes the interpretation of the movement(s) of a particular body part or the body as a whole. It can be learnt consciously as well as unconsciously.

3.2.1.1 Elements of Body Language

Each body part is an important component of body language and communicates in its own way. Let us discuss them one by one.

- (a) **Head:** Head is the part of the body that communicates in different ways. Holding the head high marks honour, confidence and self-respect, while lowering of head indicates the feeling of politeness and modesty. Jerking conveys rejection, while nodding communicates appreciation, understanding, interest, agreement or confirmation.
- (b) **Eye:** There is a saying: "Eye is extension of brain and window to soul." Eye movement is an important element of body language and expresses feelings, thoughts, emotions and intention of a person. Eyes express how deeply the person is involved in the conversation. Students' looking at the teacher, while s/he is teaching, implies that they are paying attention; but if they are watching outside the window, it shows their inattentiveness. Eye contact is of paramount importance in face-to-face interaction. Long eye contact reflects interest, confidence and pride whereas brief eye contact indicates disinterest, nervousness or embarrassment. Eye contact is the means of gaining feedback and enables the speaker to alter, adjust and reframe his message. The language of eye is universal in almost all the cultures.
- (c) **Face:** Face is the most expressive part of the body. It expresses what is going on within the mind of an individual. Whatever a person feels deep inside is reflected on her/his face. The lines of forehead, the muscles of cheeks, the eyebrows and lips communicate the feelings, thoughts and intention of a person very well. In

general, face and facial expressions can be said the true index of one's emotional and thinking behavior. When one is perturbed, her/his face reflects the level of anxiety and stress. Similarly, when one is in a happy or joyful mood, her/his facial expressions convey the same to others. It is why we can easily conclude that one is angry, fearful, jealous, astonished, showing love, sympathy or hatred. Much of the language of facial expressions is almost similar and universal all around the world.

- (d) **Posture:** Posture refers to 'the way of standing, sitting, lying and walking'. The way in which a person sits, stands or walks makes the difference. Standing or sitting erect, leaning forward or backward make an immediate impression on the mind of other person(s). Erect posture conveys confidence, bent posture reflects thinking, and relaxed posture indicates balanced state of mind. Drooping shoulders and protruding stomach convey that the person is discouraged, tired and worn out. Posture plays an important role in oral communication. Audience judge the speaker's personality from her/his posture whether s/he is vibrant, alive, dynamic, nervous, confident or self assured. The speaker can also gauge the success of her/his communication by observing the posture of the listener(s).
- (e) **Gestures:** Gestures refer to 'the motion of hands or other body parts to emphasize a point'. The movements of body parts such as hands, arms, legs, head, etc., contribute to the meaning of oral messages. For example, the movement of hands, while one is delivering a lecture or making a presentation, reinforces the communication; while shuffling of feet communicates nervousness. Proper coordination of speech and gestures enhance the effectiveness of communication manifold.
- (f) **Personal Appearance:** Physical appearance includes a person's way of dressing, hairstyle, wearing makeup, wearing shoes, etc. Good appearance attracts the attention of everybody and acts as a significant non-verbal cue. A person is judged on the basis of her/his clothes, hair style, personal hygiene, body odour, and even skin tone. That's the reason that some organizations prescribe a kind of dress to wear on certain occasions. Personal appearance also plays an important role during public speaking. Personality of the speaker leaves an immediate impression on the audience and they form an opinion about her/him even before s/he starts speaking. For example, the speaker dressed in suit, tie and polished shoes communicates that s/he believes in formal and well structured programme; whereas a person in loose or casual dress communicates that s/he is quite informal and careless to many things.

3.2.2 Sign Language

Communication is the process in which people exchange the messages and meanings through mutually understandable signs, signals and symbols. These can be audio as well as visual. Audio signals include alarm clocks, sirens, bells, etc., while visuals include

pictures, drawings, posters, maps, marks, colours, or so. They are quite efficient in conveying a message. For example, a buzzer streamlines the start of working hours of an organization. Similarly, the red colour of traffic light signals the drivers to stop their vehicles. These signs and signals have their particular meaning and act as a language which is called sign language. It is a very popular and effective means of communication to communicate with deaf and dumb, intellectually retarded or uneducated persons.

Activity : 1

Have you watched the news telecasted for deaf persons on television? Watch the news and try to understand the meaning of the signals made by the presenter.

3.2.3 Paralanguage

The term paralanguage consists of two words: 'Para', meaning 'like' or 'similar to'; and language, the mode of communication. Paralanguage literally means like language, but actually it is not verbal. However words are used in paralanguage, but the language focuses on 'how' rather than 'what'. It lays stress on how the words are spoken, rather than on their literal meaning. It aims at the tone of voice with which something is said. For example, a louder voice suggests anger or assertion, while the whisper indicates secrecy.

Paralanguage is non-verbal because it does not consist of words in literal sense, but it is close to verbal communication because it shows how the words are spoken or uttered. Actually it is a middle path between verbal and non-verbal communication. It is an important supplement to verbal communication because it makes oral communication effective and complete.

Mainly, paralanguage is a part of non-verbal communication. It emphasizes on voice nuances. It has the ability to modify or nuance the meaning, pitch, volume, emotion, or so. It can be used consciously as well as unconsciously. People normally use paralanguage multiple times a day even without being aware that they are doing so.

Paralinguistic properties of speech play an important role in human communication. Speech has non-verbal elements- voice quality, speaking style, speed, accent, volume, pitch, tone, rhythm, pause, modulation, fluency, intonation and stress. Paralanguage studies how a speaker speaks. The study includes non-verbal factors: the tone or pitch of voice (high or low), the pace (fast or slow), the volume (loud or soft), the emphasis or stress on words, break in the sentence, faltering, hesitation, and so on. These factors contain the following elements:

- **Word stress:** The stress placed on a particular word in a phrase or a sentence is called 'word stress'. It helps to make out whether an utterance is a statement, a question, a request, or an order. For example, the sentence- Shut *the door*- can be

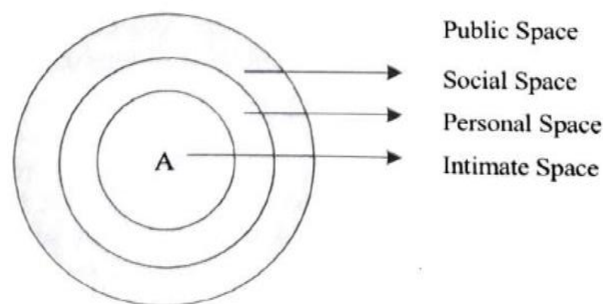
used as a request as well as an order. If the word 'shut' is stressed, it may be taken as an order; but if the word 'door' is stressed, it may be taken as a request.

- **Intonation:** Intonation is related to the rise and fall of the pitch of voice. Pitch plays an important role in intonation. Pitch is determined by the frequency of vibration of the vocal cords. Each word is made up of one or more than one syllables. For example, the word *captain* is made up of two syllables- cap and tain. In the words, having two or more syllables, all the syllables are not equally prominent. Sometimes one of them is pronounced with greater prominence than the other(s). That syllable is said to be accented. It may be stressed with the help of greater breath force, muscular effort and amplitude of the vibration of the vocal cords. For example, the syllable 'cap' is stressed in the word *captain*.

Other than vocal characteristics, paralanguage also includes facial expressions, eye movements, hand gestures, etc. It is sometimes related to non-phonemic properties, such as laughing, crying, whispering, sighing, groaning, sneezing, or so.

3.2.4 Proxemics/ Space Distancing

The word 'proxemics' has been derived from the word 'proximity' which means 'the region close around a person'. The space or distance that a person chooses to maintain from others is also a part of non-verbal communication. All of us create imaginary inner and outer circles which are based on the relations. The space marks the relationship between the two persons. The different types of spaces are as follows:



- **Intimate Space:** It is the inner most circle. We allow only selected persons, such as family members or close friends to enter into it. The intimacy or closeness conveys the relationship between the two.

- **Personal Space:** We allow common friends, colleagues and co-workers to enter into this space.
- **Social Space:** It is the outer-most circle. All the official and professional relationships are allowed to enter into it.
- **Public Space:** Everybody can enter into this space.

Space or distance plays an important role in the process of communication. Each communicator maintains a personal territory around her/him. S/he maintains some distance from others. The distance depends upon the relationship between the speaker and the listener. This space reflects the relationship, closeness and status of the person to whom the speaker is communicating. In case of informal relationship, the space will be less; but the space will be more in case of formal relations.

The space also depends on the situation. More distance is maintained between the speaker and the listener(s) in a formal situation, while there will be less distance in an informal situation. It also includes a reference to the standing and seated positions. The person, in the superior or commanding position, usually stands, and others remain seated. We can find the example from the organizational meetings. The superior talks to the subordinates in a standing position, and the subordinates remain seated. Proxemics is the study of this territory or distance.

3.2.5 Chronemics/ Time Language

Chronemics refers to 'the study of usage of time'. It involves the meaning given to the time dimension. It deals with the manner in which one structures one's time and interactions. Time is an important component of non-verbal communication. It reveals the character of a person. Work done in time speaks about the worth of a person. Completion of task within specified time communicates sincerity, reliability and hard work, whereas habitually late coming or absenteeism communicates unreliability and laziness of the person. For example, a student's punctuality reflects her/his sincerity and interest in the study, whereas lateness conveys insincerity and disinterest.

Punctuality is equally important in business world. Speed and punctuality affect the image of an organization. Delay communicates mismanagement and people lose faith in the organization, while completion of work on time communicates smooth management and builds a positive corporate image.

3.2.6 Haptics/ Touch Language

Touch is one of the means of physical contact and easier form of human communication. Patting on one's back, embracing, kissing, and shaking hands are some of the common haptic gestures. One can use touch to communicate affection, familiarity, sympathy, motivation, hatred or other emotions. A gentle touch at the arm of a person is used to draw her/his attention, while a gentle hand on the shoulder communicates motivation. We use handshake to greet people. A gentle shake-hand communicates the feeling of friendship, whereas limp shake-hand communicates lack of interest. Haptics is related to the study of physical touch and how it is used to communicate the message.

Touch is also the marker of organizational status. It helps in building favorable relations. Generally, the senior initiates the process and controls it. Since touch is closely associated with the display of intimacy and affection, it should be used appropriately to convey the purpose in a proper way.

3.2.7 Silence

Silence is another means of non-verbal communication. It doesn't use words, but can have some signals, like eye movements, facial expressions, postures, gestures, etc. However it is a passive non-verbal means, but acts as an effective communicative tool. Silence has different connotations and meanings in different contexts. It can communicate fear, respect, shyness, disgust, sadness, disagreement, ignorance, or so. For example, the silence of students in the class communicates their interest, but when the teacher asks a question, the silence of the student communicates that s/he doesn't know the answer.

Meetings are held in all the organizations to discuss certain issues. Silence can rob very purpose of the meeting. Silence of a member may communicate that s/he is either ignorant about the matter being discussed, or not interested in the discussion.
