

Kinesics, Haptics and Proxemics: Aspects of Non -Verbal Communication

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Abstract: *The Non-verbal communication is conveying of emotions, feelings, and messages through actions and expressions rather than words. In our daily life the Non- verbal communication and the verbal communication go hand in hand. In fact sometimes it's our expressions and body language that expresses our emotions better than words. Facial expressions are the most common way of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless (mostly visual) cues between people. It is sometimes mistakenly referred to as body language (kinesics), but nonverbal communication encompasses much more, such as use of touch (haptic) and distance (proxemics). Non-verbal communication includes those important but unspoken signals that individuals exhibit, specifically: body language (encompassing carriage/posture, appearance, listening, and eye contact), hand gestures, and facial expressions.*

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Nonverbal communication includes those important but unspoken signals that individuals exhibit, specifically: body language (encompassing carriage/posture, appearance, listening, and eye contact), hand gestures, and facial expressions. This paper is going to stress on three aspects of Nonverbal communication. The three main aspects of nonverbal communication are kinesics, haptic and proxemics.

I. Kinesics

The word kinesics comes from the root word *kinesis*, which means “movement,” and refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and face movements. Specifically, this section will outline the use of gestures, head movements and posture, eye contact, and facial expressions as nonverbal communication.

Gestures

There are three main types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators. **Adaptors** are touching behaviors and movements that indicate internal states typically related to arousal or anxiety. Adaptors can be targeted toward the self, objects, or others. In regular social situations, adaptors result from uneasiness, anxiety, or a general sense that we are not in control of our surroundings. Many of us subconsciously click pens, shake our legs, or engage in other adaptors during classes, meetings, or while waiting as a way to do something with our excess energy. Common self-touching behaviors like scratching, twirling hair, or fidgeting with fingers or hands are considered self-adaptors. Some self-adaptors manifest internally, as coughs or throat-clearing sounds. Smartphones have become common object adaptors, as people can fiddle with their phones to help ease anxiety. Finally, as noted, other adaptors are more common in social situations than in public speaking situations given the speaker's distance from audience members. Other adaptors involve adjusting or grooming others, similar to how primates like chimpanzees pick things off each other.

Emblems are gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning. These are still different from the signs used by hearing-impaired people or others who communicate using American Sign Language (ASL). Even though they have a generally agreed-on meaning, they are not part of a formal sign system like ASL that is explicitly taught to a group of people. A hitchhiker's raised thumb, the “OK” sign with thumb and index finger connected in a circle with the other three fingers sticking up, and the raised middle finger are all examples of emblems that have an agreed-on meaning or meanings with a culture. Emblems can be still or in motion.”*Emblems are gestures that have a specific meaning. In the United States, a thumbs-up can mean “I need a ride” or “OK!”*

Illustrators are the most common type of gesture and are used to illustrate the verbal message they accompany. For example, you might use hand gestures to indicate the size or shape of an object. Unlike emblems, illustrators do not typically have meaning on their own and are used more subconsciously than emblems. These largely

involuntary and seemingly natural gestures flow from us as we speak but vary in terms of intensity and frequency based on context.

II. Head Movements and Posture

They are often both used to acknowledge others and communicate interest or attentiveness. In terms of head movements, a head nod is a universal sign of acknowledgement in cultures where the formal bow is no longer used as a greeting. In these cases, the head nod essentially serves as an abbreviated bow. An innate and universal head movement is the headshake back and forth to signal “no.” This nonverbal signal begins at birth, even before a baby has the ability to know that it has a corresponding meaning. Babies shake their head from side to side to reject their mother’s breast and later shake their head to reject attempts to spoon-feed. There are four general human postures: standing, sitting, squatting, and lying down.

Eye Contact

We also communicate through eye behaviors, primarily eye contact. While eye behaviors are often studied under the category of kinesics, they have their own branch of nonverbal studies called oculosics, which comes from the Latin word *oculus*, meaning “eye.” The face and eyes are the main point of focus during communication, and along with our ears our eyes take in most of the communicative information around us. The saying “The eyes are the window to the soul” is actually accurate in terms of where people typically think others are “located,” which is right behind the eyes. Eye contact serves several communicative functions ranging from regulating interaction to monitoring interaction, to conveying information, to establishing interpersonal connections. In terms of regulating communication, we use eye contact to signal to others that we are ready to speak or we use it to cue others to speak. I’m sure we’ve all been in that awkward situation where a teacher asks a question, no one else offers a response, and he or she looks directly at us as if to say, “What do you think?” In that case, the teacher’s eye contact is used to cue us to respond. During an interaction, eye contact also changes as we shift from speaker to listener. Our eyes bring in the visual information we need to interpret people’s movements, gestures, and eye contact. A speaker can use his or her eye contact to determine if an audience is engaged, confused, or bored and then adapt his or her message accordingly. Our eyes also send information to others. Making eye contact with others also communicates that we are paying attention and are interested in what another person is saying. Eye contact can also be used to intimidate others.

Facial Expressions

Our faces are the most expressive part of our bodies. Think of how photos are often intended to capture a particular expression “in a flash” to preserve for later viewing. Even though a photo is a snapshot in time, we can still interpret much meaning from a human face caught in a moment of expression, and basic facial expressions are recognizable by humans all over the world. Much research has supported the universality of a core group of facial expressions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust. The first four are especially identifiable across cultures. *Our faces are the most expressive part of our body and can communicate an array of different emotions.* When delivering something light-hearted or humorous, a smile, bright eyes, and slightly raised eyebrows will nonverbally enhance our verbal message. When delivering something serious or somber, a furrowed brow, a tighter mouth, and even a slight head nod can enhance that message.

III. Haptics

Think of how touch has the power to comfort someone in moment of sorrow when words alone cannot. This positive power of touch is countered by the potential for touch to be threatening because of its connection to sex and violence. To learn about the power of touch, we turn to haptics, which refers to the study of communication by touch. We probably get more explicit advice and instruction on how to use touch than any other form of nonverbal communication. A lack of nonverbal communication competence related to touch could have negative interpersonal consequences; for example, if we don’t follow the advice we’ve been given about the importance of a firm handshake, a person might make negative judgments about our confidence or credibility. A lack of competence could have more dire negative consequences, including legal punishment, if we touch someone inappropriately (intentionally or unintentionally). Touch is necessary for human social development, and it can be welcoming, threatening, or persuasive. There are several types of touch, including functional-professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, love-intimacy, and sexual-arousal touch. Touch is also important at more intimate levels. At the friendship-warmth level, touch is more important and more ambiguous than at the social-polite level. At this level, touch interactions are important because they serve a relational maintenance purpose and communicate closeness, liking, care, and concern.

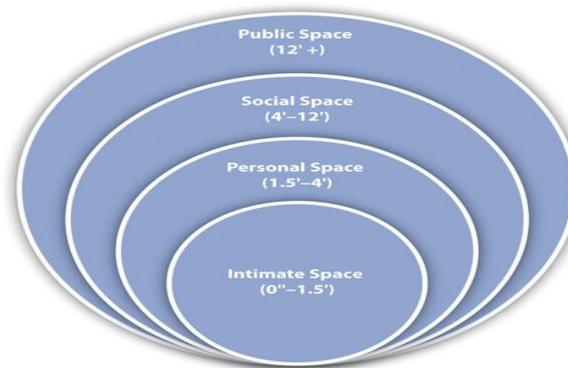
Proxemics

Proxemics refers to the study of how space and distance influence communication. We only need look at the ways in which space shows up in common metaphors to see that space, communication, and relationships are closely related. For example, when we are content with and attracted to someone, we say we are “close” to him or her. When we lose connection with someone, we may say he or she is “distant.” In general, space influences how people communicate and behave. Smaller spaces with a higher density of people often lead to breaches of our personal space bubbles. If this is a setting in which this type of density is expected beforehand, like at a crowded concert or on a train during rush hour, then we make various communicative adjustments to manage the space issue. Unexpected breaches of personal space can lead to negative reactions, especially if we feel someone has violated our space voluntarily, meaning that a crowding situation didn’t force them into our space.

Proxemics Distances

We all have varying definitions of what our “personal space” is, and these definitions are contextual and depend on the situation and the relationship. Scholars have identified four zones for US Americans, which are public, social, personal, and intimate distance. We can see how these zones relate to each other and to the individual in Figure 4.1 "proxemics Zones of Personal Space". Even within a particular zone, interactions may differ depending on whether someone is in the outer or inner part of the zone.

Figure 4.1 proxemics Zones of Personal Space



Public Space (12 Feet or More)

Public and social zones refer to the space four or more feet away from our body, and the communication that typically occurs in these zones is formal and not intimate. Public space starts about twelve feet from a person and extends out from there. This is the least personal of the four zones and would typically be used when a person is engaging in a formal speech and is removed from the audience to allow the audience to see or when a high-profile or powerful person like a celebrity or executive maintains such a distance as a sign of power or for safety and security reasons

Social Space (4–12 Feet)

Communication that occurs in the social zone, which is four to twelve feet away from our body, is typically in the context of a professional or casual interaction, but not intimate or public. This distance is preferred in many professional settings because it reduces the suspicion of any impropriety. The expression “keep someone at an arm’s length” means that someone is kept out of the personal space and kept in the social/professional space. It is also possible to have people in the outer portion of our social zone but not feel obligated to interact with them, but when people come much closer than six feet to us then we often feel obligated to at least acknowledge their presence. In many typically sized classrooms, much of your audience for a speech will actually be in your social zone rather than your public zone, which is actually beneficial because it helps you establish a better connection with them.

Personal Space (1.5–4 Feet)

Personal and intimate zones refer to the space that starts at our physical body and extends four feet. These zones are reserved for friends, close acquaintances, and significant others. Much of our communication occurs in the personal zone, which is what we typically think of as our “personal space bubble” and extends from 1.5 feet to 4 feet away from our body. Even though we are getting closer to the physical body of another person, we may use verbal communication at this point to signal that our presence in this zone is friendly and not intimate. Even people who know each other could be uncomfortable spending too much time in this zone

unnecessarily. We can easily touch the other person as we talk to them, briefly placing a hand on his or her arm or engaging in other light social touching that facilitates conversation, self-disclosure, and feelings of closeness.

Intimate Space

As we breach the invisible line that is 1.5 feet from our body, we enter the intimate zone, which is reserved for only the closest friends, family, and romantic/intimate partners. It is impossible to completely ignore people when they are in this space, even if we are trying to pretend that we're ignoring them. A breach of this space can be comforting in some contexts and annoying or frightening in others. We need regular human contact that isn't just verbal but also physical. Being close to someone and feeling their physical presence can be very comforting when words fail. There are also social norms regarding the amount of this type of closeness that can be displayed in public, as some people get uncomfortable even seeing others interacting in the intimate zone. While some people are comfortable engaging in or watching others engage in PDAs (public displays of affection).

Territoriality

Territoriality is an innate drive to take up and defend spaces. This drive is shared by many creatures and entities, ranging from packs of animals to individual humans to nations. Whether it's a gang territory, a neighborhood claimed by a particular salesperson, our preferred place to sit in a restaurant, our usual desk in the classroom, or the seat we've marked to save while getting concessions at a sporting event, we claim certain spaces as our own. There are three main divisions for territory: primary, secondary, and public. A person's house, yard, room, desk, side of the bed, or shelf in the medicine cabinet could be considered primary territories. Secondary territories don't belong to us and aren't exclusively under our control, but they are associated with us, which may lead us to assume that the space will be open and available to us when we need it without us taking any further steps to reserve it. This happens in classrooms regularly. Students often sit in the same desk or at least same general area as they did on the first day of class. There may be some small adjustments during the first couple of weeks, but by a month into the semester, we don't notice students moving much voluntarily. Public territories are open to all people. People are allowed to mark public territory and use it for a limited period of time, but space is often up for grabs, which makes public space difficult to manage for some people and can lead to conflict. To avoid this type of situation, people use a variety of objects that are typically recognized by others as nonverbal cues that mark a place as temporarily reserved—for example, jackets, bags, papers, or a drink. There is some ambiguity in the use of markers, though.

Importance of non-verbal communication

There is a proverb "Actions speak louder than words." In essence, this underscores the importance of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is especially significant in intercultural situations. Researches in communication suggest that many more feelings and intentions are sent and received non-verbally than verbally. Mehrabian and Wiener following suggested that only 7 % of message is sent through words, with remaining 93% sent non-verbal expressions (depending on author, verbal part goes up to 35%). It has multiple advantages or functions:

Complementary: Non-verbal cues complement a verbal message by adding to its meaning. We can pat someone we offended at the back as we say sorry to him or her.

Easy presentation: Information can be easily presented in non-verbal communication through using visual, audio-visual and silent means of non-verbal communication.

Substituting: Non-verbal message may substitute for the verbal message especially if it is blocked by noise, interruption, long distance etc. for example: gestures-finger to lips to indicate need for quite, facial expressions-a nod instead of a yes.

Accenting: Often used to accent a verbal message. Verbal tone indicates the actual meaning of the specific words.

Repeat: Used to repeat the verbal message (e.g. point in a direction while stating directions.)

Help to illiterate people: This type of communication use gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, proximity, touching etc. and without using any spoken or written word. So, it is very much helpful for illiterate people.

Help to handicapped people: Non-verbal cues of communication greatly help in handicapped people especially to deaf people. Deaf people exchange message through the movements of hands, fingers, eye ball etc.

Attractive presentation: Non-verbal communication is based on visual, picture, graph, sign etc. that can be seen very much attractive.

Reducing wastage of time: The message of non-verbal communication reached the receiver very fast. For this reason it reduces the wastage of valuable time of the communicator.

Quick expression of message: Non-verbal cues of communication like sign and symbol can also communicate some messages very quickly than written or oral messages.

Disadvantages or limitations of non-verbal communication

Despite of advantages of non-verbal communication, it is not free from its limitations or disadvantages which are:

Vague and imprecise: Non-verbal communication is quite vague and imprecise. Since in this communication there is no use of words or language which expresses clear meaning to the receiver. No dictionary can accurately classify them. Their meaning varies not only by culture and context but by degree of intension.

Continuous: It is possible to stop talking in **verbal communication**, but it is generally not possible to stop nonverbal cues. Also, spoken language has a structure that makes it easier to tell when a subject has changed, for instance or to analyze its grammar. Nonverbal does not lend itself to this kind of analysis.

Multi-channel: while watching someone's eyes, you may miss something significant in a hand gesture. Everything is happening at once and therefore it may be confusing to try to keep up with everything. Most of us simply do not do so, at least not consciously.

Culture-bound: Non-verbal communication is learnt in childhood, passed on to you by your parents and others with whom you associate. A few other gestures seem to be universal. Evidence suggests that humans of all cultures smile when happy and frown when unhappy. However, most nonverbal symbols seem to be even further disconnected from any "essential meaning" than verbal symbols. Gestures seen as positive in one culture (Like the thumbs-up gesture in the USA) may be seen as obscene in another culture.

Long conversations are not possible: In non-verbal communication, long conversation and necessary explanations are not possible. No party can discuss the particular issues of the messages.

Difficult to understand: Difficult to understand and requires a lot of repetitions in **non-verbal communication**. Since it uses gestures, facial expressions eye contact, touch etc. for communicating with others which may not be understandable for the simple and foolish people.

Not everybody prefers: Everybody not prefers to communicate through non-verbal communication with others. Sometimes it cannot create an impression upon people or listeners. It is less influential and cannot be used everywhere. It is cannot be used as a public tool for communication.

Lack of formality: Non-verbal communication does not follow any rules, formality or structure like other communication. Most of the cases people unconsciously and habitually engaged in non-verbal communication by moving the various parts of the body.

Costly: In some cases non-verbal communication involves huge cost. For example, neon sign, power point presentation, cinema etc. are very much costly compared to others form of communication.

Distortion of information: Since it uses gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, touch, sign, sound, paralanguage etc. for communicating with others, there is a great possibility in distortion of information in non-verbal communication.

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