

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Importance of Non-Verbal Communication Skills during Effective Presentation

Rijumoni Gogoi

Department of Science & Humanities, Rajiv Gandhi Govt. Polytechnic
Vivek-Vihar, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Abstract:

Non-verbal means of communication are equally important like verbal skills for effective communication. It is said that the manner one delivers a speech has the ability to capture the audience's interest on the matter of the topic. Non-verbal communication skills have thus great role to play as it is related to the manner of delivering a presentation. Sometimes our body begins to speak before we actually start speaking. It is due to our unconscious use of some non-verbal means that the audience can decode our behavioral patterns. In fact, personality factors such as nervousness, cooperation, frustration, weakness, lack of confidence or over-confidence etc can be better evaluated by decoding the non-verbal means of communication. So it is always advantageous to use proper body language during a presentation as one's personality is an overall culmination of both spoken and behavioral languages. The aim of this paper is to examine how Non-verbal means of communication greatly influence the presentation process and thereby suggesting some measures to avoid negative means of Non-verbal communication.

Key words: Non-verbal communication, Kinesics, Haptics

1. Introduction

To put in simple terms, Communication that takes place without the use of words or speech is termed as Non-verbal communication. It seems queer how anyone can communicate without the use of words or speech. If we turned back to history, we find that human being before the introduction of words, used to express their feelings by gestures and postures. They used their bodies to communicate. They gritted their teeth to show anger, grinned to display their happiness and touched one another to exhibit affection. All these are different means of Non-verbal of communication that has an important role in presentation. Commenting on the importance of Non-verbal means of communication, Ravi Aggarwal in *Effective communication skills* has stated –

- 7% of the meaning in a face to face situation derived from word symbol
- 38% from voice tone and inflection
- 55% from body movements and gestures
- In all 93% of the meaning in face to face communication is transferred through non-verbal symbols.

Thus, non-verbal communication occupies an important place in any presentation. This paper will discuss in detail the various categories of Non-verbal means of communication that we use during presentation. Before going in details about the importance of Non-verbal means of communication, it will be reasonable to define the term presentation. M. Ashraf Rizvi in *Effective Technical Communication* describes it as a form of oral communication. According to Rizvi-“It is a participative two-way communication process, characterized by the formal and structured presentation of a message using visual aids. It is purposeful and goal-oriented, and communicates a message to an audience in a way that brings about the desired change in their understanding” (Rizvi: 195). Indrajit Bhattacharya in *An Approach to Communication Skills* has defined it as follows:

“Non-verbal communication is a communication through one's body language and environment referring to all external stimuli and external manifestations other than spoken or written words that include body movement, characteristics of physical appearance, the voice quality and use of space distancing. (Bhattacharya:14)

Rizvi also speaks about the various form of oral presentation: seminars, workshop, industry conference, product launches, press conference, team presentations, company profile presentation etc. To be an efficient presenter, one has to be well acquainted in different categories of Non-verbal means of communication apart from other necessary steps of verbal communication like audience awareness, choosing the right topic, organizing the material data, use of visual aids etc. However this paper will concentrate mainly on the non verbal skills rather than the verbal ones.

According to Sarmah et al. in *Communication skills for engineers and scientist*, there are seven lac forms of non verbal communication which are difficult to interpret at all. However it can be grouped in to the following categories.

- Kinesics
- Proxemics
- Chronemics
- Para Language
- Haptics
- Meta communication

1.1. Kinesics

Ray Birdwhistell coined the term 'Kinesics'. According to him, kinesics is the science that analyses the movement of bodily organs. He observed that no movement of the body is out of meaning. None are accidental. Body language can reveal the idiosyncrasies of a person. Body language consists of personal appearance, eyes, facial expression, gestures and postures. A brief analysis of these is given below.

1.1.1. Personal Appearance

Personal appearance creates the first impression on the audience about the speaker. The audience judges us initially on the basis of our dress, shoes, hair style and even the colour of the suits. So, it is very much necessary to make our personality appealing with a little care and a sense of presentability. Our dress should suit the occasion and of course we should be neat and clean if not attractive.

1.1.2. Eye Contact

It is said that one's eyes mirror one's heart and conceal one's mind. While making a presentation, a favorable glance at the audience helps in creating interest among them. Nobody likes a speaker who engages himself in his notes or is lost behind the screen. Eye-contact reveals the speaker's identity and helps him or her in getting over his or her self consciousness. Eye contact acts as a means to get the feedback from the audience. So we should know how to look equally at all. It is advisable to avoid gazing unnecessarily and restricts some negative movements of the eye. Eye-brows with upper and lower eye-lids raised combine with dilated pupils- tell us that the person is excited, surprised or frightened. Again the eye-brows with upper and lower eye-lids closed, combine with constricted pupils, will tell us that the person is angry. Brief eye-contact generally reveals embarrassment, timidity or nervousness. So we should be very careful while using our eyes as a means of communication.

1.1.3. Facial Expression

A speaker with a positive facial expression, such as a smile on face can win the crowd and make a good impression on the listeners. For sustaining the interest and response of the audience the facial expression should be meaningful. Biting the lips or raising the eye-brows at regular interval or blinking the eyes too often is negative expression of the face which not only disappoints the audience but also spoils the smooth flow of message. Hence careful speakers work hard to ensure that their facial expressions attract the audience's attention.

1.1.4. Gestures

Gesture implies the movements of other parts of our body, except face and eyes like hands, arms, head, and shoulders. Gestures are quite essential during presentation. Through proper practice we can use appropriate gestures in speaking, gestures do add meaning to the message but they may turn awkward if not used properly.

Sarmah et al. in *Communication skills for engineers and scientist*, mentioned about the different types of gestures along with their meaning and affects. For example, looking at the watch frequently – indicating restlessness, looking at the roof(unable to face the crowd), playing with the buttons of the shirt –(unease), biting nails- (nervousness), cracking knuckles- (reluctance), wiping forehead-(unease), etc. are negative gestures which should be avoided as far as possible. Again leaning to-towards the listener-(enthusiasm), nodding head at times- (agreeing), etc are positive gestures and should be practiced.

1.1.5. Posture

Posture generally implies the positioning of one's legs while standing or speaking. To make the best impression possible, one should try to use the right posture as stated by Ravi Aggarwal as follows:

- Holding one's head straight.
- Maintaining the upper body erect.
- Standing on both feet.
- Sitting intently.

Again we should avoid negative postures like, reclining on the lectern which signifies lack of interest in the subject matter. Again being too close to the microphone and sagging one's shoulder may symbolize morbidity and distract the attention of the crowd. So we should avoid doing all these.

1.2. Proxemics

It means the study of nearness or distance in a communication scenario. American anthropologist Edward T.Hall, who coined the word proxemics, mentioned four zones associated with communication:

- Intimate Zone
- Personal Zone
- Social Zone
- Public Zone

As a speaker, while giving presentation it is advisable to maintain the area of social zone, which ranges from 4 to 10 feet. In social interaction we always maintain this zone which is formal in nature, taking care of the standing and seated position. The presenter normally stands straight in front of a sitting audience.

1.3. Chronemics

It is the study that concerns with human being's proper utilization of time during communication. As a presenter, it is always required to complete the presentation within the stipulated time without creating monotony in the audience's mind.

1.4. Para Language

It implies the quality of one's voice, the tone, intonation, and variations of language other than the actual words. It also includes pauses and insertions such as 'oh', 'uh', 'you know' etc., since these signal our meaning too. A careful speaker reaps the advantages of these paralinguistic features, which a casual speaker ignores.

1.5. Haptics

It is related to the study of touch behavior in communication. Though it is an important means of showing intimacy, warmth, comfort, discomforts etc. sometimes touching may have the possibility to be misinterpreted. As a speaker, it is always advantageous not to touch the audience and maintaining a proper distance.

1.6. Meta Communication

it means beyond communication. It is associated with the implied or hidden meaning of any word or expression. It is non verbal because we have to recognize the meaning within our mind which is hidden behind the actual utterances. Tactful speaker sometimes use Meta communication to remain on a safer side.

All the above mentioned non- verbal skills have to be used properly to be an efficient presenter along with other verbal skills. Though one can speak fluently, because of the misuse of these non verbal means his or her presentation will not be well received by the audience. Out of ignorance unconsciously many people misused the non verbal means of communication. But a proper understanding of these will help them to avoid negative body languages. Practice can make a man perfect and it is through practice that we can correct our negative aspects and acquire the positive ones. From my personal experience as a lecturer in communication skill, I observed the non- verbal behavior of the students and found that many students used some common body languages which negatively affect the presentation. These are listed below along with their implications and proper way of using them.

Negative aspects of body language	Implications	Proper way of using
Putting hands inside the pocket	Nervousness	Standing on both foot keeping the hands straight and out of pocket
Touching the nose with hands	Indicating lies	Keeping hands in the right position
Hands over mouth	Uncertainty	Keeping hands in the right position
Arms crossed	Defense	Keeping hands in the right position
Stirring either the right or left leg	Restlessness	Standing with feet slightly apart
Looking at the walls or looking down	Uneasiness or Reluctant to speak	proper eye-contact with the audience
Raising of eye-brows with a frown	Confusion/ Uncertainty	Natural look and smiling face
Leaning on the lectern	Timidity / laziness	Standing in the proper way
Remaining silent for some time as it to remember something	Cramming/ miss conception	Being fluent in speaking
Starts trembling while speaking	Lack of confidence/ Nervousness	Taking audience as friends

Table 1

Though there are numerous other negative gestures, postures, facial expressions the students use during presentation, these are frequently used by almost 40% of the students. I think, out of ignorance and lack of proper understanding of these gestures and postures have prompted the students to misuse them. After a proper comprehension of the implications of different body languages, they will be able to use them in an appropriate manner.

2. Conclusion

The ability to deliver an effective presentation is essential for all of us. We should know how to present our ideas in a persuasive way, how to capture the attention of the audience and how to reflect confidence while speaking. Appropriate knowledge in the use of non-verbal skills is essential to one's acquiring effectiveness in communication. Sometimes efficiency in the use of these skills, to some extent, can make up for the lapses and inadequacies, one has in verbal communication. In some advanced countries, a well-written presentation if delivered with a manner that does not suit the occasion or in a mood that is not pleasant; the impact is bound to be negative. For all these we need to use proper Non-verbal means of communication by avoiding the negative gesture, postures etc. We should concentrate both on the manner as well as matter of presentation in order to make it effective and memorable in front of an audience.

3. References

1. Aggarwal, Ravi. (2008). Effective Communication Skills. Sublime publication, Jaipur, India
2. Bhattacharya, Indrajit, (2008) An Approach to Communication skills. Nai sarak, Delhi, Dhanpat Rai & Co.
3. Prasad, P. (2011-12). The functional Aspects of Communicational Skills. New Delhi, Katson Books
4. Sarmah. S and Mishra, B. (2009). Communication skills for Engineers & Scientist, New Delhi, PHI learning Pvt ltd.
5. Rizvi, A, M. (2005). Effective Technical communication. New Delhi, Tata Mc graw hills Pub. Co