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## **Translating Body Language**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The proverb or the old saying "action speaks louder than words" holds true. In a given situation, even if we do not communicate verbally, our body speaks volumes by revealing our feelings and emotions. Body language and non-verbal communication go hand in hand. Our body movements, postures, gestures including appearances etc are guided by inner thoughts, emotions and feelings. Just as any language uses a set of symbols to represent letters and words to convey the meanings, body language, mostly unconsciously, carries messages, attitudes, status, mood etc of the person. Although dress, accessories, perfumes and cosmetics are used to convey own feelings consciously but most persons doing so are unaware of their importance in interpersonal communications.*

*Body language has emerged as the richest language known and researches are adding more and newer dimensions to the concept and scope of non-verbal language. This paper discusses different components of body language and their role in communication.*

**Keywords: Non- verbal communication, facial expressions, gestures**

### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

Humans have been using body language to convey our thoughts since ancient times. Before spoken languages were developed, they communicated with other members by using various parts of our body – face, eyes, limbs, body and sounds to convey their feelings, emotions, ideas etc. However, interest in the subject started only after Charles Darwin wrote his book titled "Expressions of Emotions in Men and Animals" in 1872 and has increased after Julius Fast wrote his book titled, "Body Language" in 1970. Also called non-verbal communication, it is a complex process involving people and the gestures, expressions and sounds they make to communicate with others. Charlie Chaplin and other famous actors of silent movies may be considered to be pioneers in non-verbal communication skills as they conveyed meaning of their acting without uttering any dialogue.

### **II. IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT BODY LANGUAGE:**

Today, body language is a crucial mean of communication. Statistics show that a mere 7% of true communication is verbal 38% depends on your voice and tone and 55% depends on your body language. It surprises me that this aspect of language learning is almost always neglected in language and translation training, especially when so much of our everyday communicative efforts are done by nonverbal communication.

In recent years body language has been the focus of many studies - a study has arrived at the relative proportion of the use of different parts of the body:

Part of body	Proportion as a percent
Head	08
Eyes	16
Ears	03
Nose	03
Mouth	06
Lips	06
Face	16
Heart	10
Neck	06
Throat	06
Fingers	08
Feet	06
Belly	06
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100	

The upper parts of the body contribute 80 % of the total communication. A large number of stimuli come under the umbrella of body language .some of these are:

Smiling	Hair style	Yawn	Scream
Frowning	Skin color	Snore	Laughter
Glances	Perfume used	Sigh	Whistle
Posture	Dress	Moan	
Walking style	Physical features	Voice quality	
Spatial distance		Accent	
		Tone	

Researchers have already identified about 1,000,000 gestures, expressions and sounds that can provide valuable clues to managers and leaders while communicating and negotiating with others. Body language is read by observing the body posture, the eye movements and the rhythm of breathing. One of the skills, a human resource manager should possess, is the ability to read the body language. This would help him while conducting interviews or imparting training to employees. Reading body language is a skill that could be acquired through training and practice.

Counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists are good at interpreting the body language of their clients. By reading the body language, a counselor or a psychologist is able to understand the problem of his client and prescribe the right kind of therapy.

The army and police force also use body language interpretation techniques for crime investigation. The investigative officers look for telltale signs in the body language of the criminal or accused to determine whether he is speaking the truth.

### III. MAKING EFFECTIVE USE OF BODY LANGUAGE:

Body language is the unspoken messages that a person's posture and gestures convey. Crossing your arms, twirling your hair, licking your lips, and slouching are examples of negative body language; shaking hands firmly, making eye contact, sitting up straight, and smiling are examples of positive body language. More importantly, body language reflects what we think of as subconscious messages, the content of communication that escapes the intellect's control and manipulation. Most people can greatly improve the consistency between their words and their body language by paying more attention to what their bodies are doing when they're speaking. The following are the general tips regarding the effective use of body language in public speaking:

1. Maintain eye contact :

This may be very hard to do but is essential. The speaker needs to look at the audience to see how they are reacting. Are they bored? Looking interested? When audience stops looking at the speaker, it indicates that they are not listening. Eye contact is vital in order to maintain audience's interest in what you have to say.

2. Smile:

Learn to smile from your eyes. Smiling through one's eyes is the most important skill or asset of a good orator or speaker. Smiling also has the added benefit to relaxing your vocal chords- it can help to make your voice sound more interesting.

3. Avoid creating Barriers:

The speaker needs to get as near to his audience as possible. Standing behind a desk or lectern immediately sets up a barrier. It is always tempting to hide behind something, but is undesirable.

4. Stand Square

Find a comfortable stance. The best position is standing with feet slightly apart. Try to avoid leaning up against furniture, and keep hands out of pockets.

5. Beware of distracting mannerisms:

This does not mean standing rigid. Most of us use our hands to some extent to add emphasis to what we are saying and we should not stop doing this. However, waving your arms around all over the place is likely to distract the audience. Jangling keys and coins in pockets or wearing clanking jewellery can also distract. The major problem with distracting mannerisms is that if the audience were to look onto them, it would concentrate on them rather than listening to your message.

6. Be Natural:

Be natural, sincere and genuine. Always use graceful movements, gestures and expressions as they supplement the verbal communication. Never fake it; it can be easily detected.

#### **IV. ADVANTAGES OF BODY LANGUAGE:**

Resourceful managers make effective use of the power of the body language. They are able to take several advantages by taking note of the signs and signals of body language:

- i. It is a visual form of communication and is readily visible to the receivers and thus facilitates decoding of the message more accurately.

- ii. Body language happens simultaneous to oral communication and supplements it, especially in face-to-face communications.
- iii. Since body talks subconsciously, it adds intensity to the message. Without these gestures, expressions and postures, the communication may be bland.
- iv. People are generally mindful of the body language. Its proper use can enhance the environment for business negotiations.
- v. It is a very good tool in face-to-face communication among small groups.

#### **V. LIMITATIONS OF BODY LANGUAGE:**

Some notable limitations of body language are:

- i. Since it is a non-verbal communication, it is not relied upon completely and is used as a supportive add-on. Written or oral communications are taken more seriously.
- ii. Body language is heavily influenced by the culture of the country or the region; hence one has to be very careful in their use and understanding.
- iii. Listener has to be extra careful to make note of the gestures, expressions and postures to draw meanings out of them and if he is not attentive, he can go wrong.
- iv. Body language is not effective in large gatherings. It is a very good tool in face-to-face communication among small groups.

#### **VI. COMPONENTS OF BODY LANGUAGE**

Non-verbal communication has emerged as area of major interest to budding managers / leaders because they can exploit the knowledge successfully during negotiations and other major human interactions. Based on the developments in the broad field of body language, subject can be grouped in to the followings;

1. Kinesics: Body language
2. Proxemics: Space language
3. Chronemics: Time Language
4. Paralanguage: Voice, tone and intonation
5. Sign language

##### **1. Kinesics or Body Movements**

Kinesics literally means “body movements” and has emerged as the most important area of non-verbal communication. Kinesics stands for the way the body communicates without words but with the use of movements of the body.

It must be understood that the body movements are the reflections of one’s feelings, emotions, thoughts and position in a given situation. By nodding their head or by shrugging their shoulders or by blinking their eyes, people are able to send messages that are often stronger than the spoken words. They are able to convey a large array of emotions, feelings and thoughts that need to be inferred from the signs and signals involving body movement.

Although the list of different parts of the body is large, following aspects will be discussed in some details:

- i. Facial expressions
- ii. Eye contact
- iii. Gestures
- iv. Body Shape and postures
- v. Appearance

### **i. Facial Expression**

Face is the index of heart. It is the most expressive part of the body and is also the one that is observed most by the audience. Persons' feelings and emotions get immediately transferred in to some form of expressions on the face. Facial expressions include the parts played by head, heart, eyes, nose, mouth and lips. Everyone, almost intuitively, recognizes the facial expressions associated with:

- Happiness
- Fear
- Surprise
- Anger
- Sadness
- Astonishment
- Bewilderment
- Contentment etc

Very often, facial expressions involve more than one part of the face. For example, an extremely aggressive person will have his lips closed tightly, eyes wide open, eyes and eyebrows turned down, teeth clenched and he will speak with his lips barely moving! Similarly, a defiant person will have his head and chin thrust forward, lips tensed up and pushed forward so that any person can see that he is in angry mood.

### **ii) Eye-Contact:**

Eyes have been referred to as “the mirror of the soul”. They express innermost thoughts of a person.

Owing to the critical importance of eye movements and their impact on facial expressions, this area has developed in to a science called “oculesics” – study of eye language and its grammar.

Eyes also play a significant role in execution, action taking and collecting feedback. Eyes provide feedback that is instantaneous. (76 % of the sensory feedback happens through seeing)

Eyes react instantaneously to any external stimuli. They react faster than other parts of the body, Actions and contents of speech can be “faked” quickly but it is very difficult to “fake” the expression of eyes. Eyes form the focal point of the face and body movements. Proper reading of the eyes can reveal anger, authority, fear, disgust, timidity, confidence, love, intimacy etc. Generally people's eyes approach what they like and avoid what they do not like. People generally maintain more eye gaze with whom they feel positive and whom they know and trust whereas averted eyes show anger, hurt feelings and a hesitancy to reveal the

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inner self. Eye behavior also monitors feedback and serves as a reminder. The eyes not only supply information, they receive it as well. Of course, eye contact and eye movements convey their meaning in combination with other facial expressions.

**iii) Gestures:**

Another important element of kinesics is the use of gestures. Gestures are the physical movements of arms, legs, hands, torso and head, which help one to express thoughts and to emphasize one's speech. They play a very important role in conveying meaning without using words.

Ekman and Friesen have identified five types of body gestures.

- a. **Emblems:** A large number of body movements to be identified as a substitute for verbal translations. They often replace verbal messages and take the shape of emblems.
- b. **Illustrators:** They are directly tied to verbal language. These gestures illustrate the words, which a speaker is saying. When a speaker says, "My third and final point is....." and holds up three fingers, this gesture is an illustrator.
- c. **Regulators:** Regulators control oral communication by alerting the sender to the need to hurry up, slow down, or repeat something. Some common examples are frequent glances at the watch or drumming finger on the table when someone is talking with another person. When someone is delivering a long speech and the other person wants to restrict him, he/she may show his watch to regulate or moderate him.
- d. **Displays:** These indicate emotional states, such as anger or embarrassment occurring usually in our facial expressions. The display differs from the three previous types, in that; people have less control over them. Many have felt their faces turning red, because they were angry or embarrassed. However, there is little, which they can do to control this display.
- e. **Adaptors:** They are the gestures over which people have little control. Quite often people are not conscious of performing such gestures. Stifling a yawn or clasping the hands to the face in fear is adaptor gestures.

**iv) Body Shape and Postures:**

Body language includes every aspect of your appearance, from what you wear, how you stand, look and move, to your facial expressions and physical habits such as nodding your head, jingling change in your pocket or pulling your necktie. Your use of space and gestures are other key concerns. Behavioral scientists have studied the shapes of our bodies and have broadly put them in the following types:

- (i) **Ectomorph:** Thin, youthful and tall (more ambitious, suspicious of others, tends pessimistic and quiet).
- (ii) **Mesomorph:** Strong, athletic, muscular and bony (stronger, self-reliant and dominant)
- (iii) **Endomorph:** fat, round and soft. (Talkative, warm-hearted and sympathetic).



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We cannot do much about the shape of our body, but we can put it to effective use. A person's general posture indicates some meaning without any specific gestures.

Body posture conveys variety of messages. Postures means the position of body or body parts i.e. The way you sit, the way you walk the way in which you stretch your legs. It refers to the way we hold ourselves when we stand, sit or walk. Stiff, unnatural positions such as the big leaf (hands crossed below the waist with the back of the hand toward the audience) send the message that you are unsure of yourself and your message. Instead, lower your hands to your sides in a natural, relaxed and resting posture. Standing, sitting or walking in a relaxed way is a positive posture, which will encourage questions and discussion. Squarely facing an audience, being comfortably upright and evenly distributing your weight are all aspects of posture that communicate professionalism, confidence, attention to detail and organization. Be and appear at ease; neither remains static nor fidget. Move occasionally to hold attention, suggest transitions and increase emphasis. The way you sit, stand or walk reveals a lot about you:

- Slumped posture- indicates low spirits
- Erect posture- indicates high spirits, energy and confidence.
- Lean forward- indicates open, honest and interested
- Lean backward- indicates defensive or disinterested
- Crossed arms- indicates defensive and not ready to listen
- Uncrossed arms- indicates willingness to listen

**v. Appearance:**

Personal appearance plays a significant role; people see you before they hear you. As you adapt your language to an audience, you should also dress accordingly. Appearance includes clothes, hair, jewellery, cosmetics and so on. In today's society, the purpose of clothing has changed from fulfilling a basic need to making a personalized statement. Clothes accent the body's movements. Every occasion has its own particular type of dress, which may be formal or informal.

**VII. CONCLUSION:**

Body language is indeed a crucial means of communication. Objective of learning body language is to gain knowledge and modify own behavior, change oral communication in line with the feedback and respond quickly for better total impact on the audience. Monitoring non-verbal cues enables people to improve interaction, establishes rapport by learning what pleases / offends and brings about a subconscious motivation to conscious level for complete understanding with others.

Remember, body language applies to us all. The first impression we give to others is not just about what we say, what we are wearing or what we look like. Our gestures and subtle actions express far more than we realize.

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So smile your beautiful smile, pull back your shoulders and hold your head up high for the entire world to see.

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