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# Non Verbal Cues in Group Behavior Amongst Youngsters

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**Abstract** - This paper aims to study non verbal cues in group behavior amongst youngsters. For this analysis two groups (age ranging from 18-19 years) of 66 students, 45 boys and 21 girls were studied. They were studied at different time intervals and in different setting. It has been observed that there were various non verbal cues which were more prominent and expressive than the verbal interaction. The non verbal cues of the participants which occur throughout the interaction were more instrumental in shaping the group behavior than the verbal cues.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is an exchange and flow of information and ideas from one person to another. It is the basic necessity of human life, as integral and vital as our breath. People sustain in the society through their interaction with fellow beings where meaning is conveyed in an attempt to create a shared understanding. "It is the process of transferring of thoughts or an idea so that the mental picture perceived by the receiver is the same as that envisioned by the sender." (Robbins, 1989). This flow of interaction is indicative of relationships people share in any cultural and linguistic group. In a communicative situation, one active participant encodes and transmits the message and the other receives and decodes it. The encoding and decoding takes place at different dimensions mainly verbal (using a language system) and mysteriously non verbal (using signs, symbols, posture, gestures, facial expression, artifacts etc). Communication is not only about language, rather a great deal of interaction takes place without using words through non-verbal cues, which cut across cultural and language boundaries. Albert Mehrabian (1981) has held that transmission of message is effective only when all three aspects of communication- the verbal (words-7% impact), the vocal (intonation, pitch, volume -38% impact) and the visual (gestures, posture 55% impact) are in tandem with one another.

Non verbal cues which are natural, unintentional and unconscious broadcast our true feelings in any given moment also clue us into the feelings of those around us. Although affective reactions are influenced by both verbal and nonverbal cues, inferences about

relationships and feelings (affect) are more heavily influenced by non verbal cues. (Zajonc, 1980). Non worded messages can reinforce, replace or contradict what is being communicated verbally. When people are skeptical of the sincerity of the speaker or if there is a deliberate attempt to confuse the receivers through excessive verbiage, non verbal signals are used as a yardstick to measure words and intentions of the sender. D.S. Sundaram and Cynthia Webster (2000) state that nonverbal cue of the communicators enhances pleasant affect and reduces psychological distances between them. They also modify and reinforce verbal communication.

It is important to understand non verbal signals in relation to their context. Message conveyed through non verbal medium is susceptible to misinterpretation when observed by people from different backgrounds. Charul Jain and Madhumita Choudhary (2010) suggest that in the era of cross- cultural learning, non verbal, potentially one of the strongest medium of communication can become critical in defining and displaying meanings and intentions. Therefore it is important that while transmitting or interpreting messages one should not focus on single cue in isolation but to understand the full context in which they appear.

There is a rich variety of dimensions by which we transmit and receive meaning nonverbally. Highlen and Hill (1984) have identified areas of study in non verbal behavior as *paralinguistics*, *kinesics*, *facial expressions*, *visual behavior*, *proxemics* and *touch*. Later day researchers from cultural anthropology and linguistics have added *oculesics*, *artifacts*, and *chronemics* to the list. Communication, therefore, is much more than an understanding of the spoken or written language. Abercrombie, one of the proponents of the study of paralanguage believes, "We speak with our vocal organs but we converse with our entire bodies; conversation consists of much more than a simple interchange of spoken words" (Abercrombie, 1972: 67). Based on the discussion on importance of non verbal cues in communication, this paper aims to study the non verbal / vocal behavior and attitude of students in group interaction and what role it plays in building up mutual consensus. Most of the studies have been focused on individual non verbal cues, here in this paper, an attempt would be made to study non verbal cues in a group and how it shapes the group interaction.

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There is a large amount of rich non verbal communication that acts as a catalyst in shaping the group behavior during a predominantly verbal discussion.

## II. METHODOLOGY

In this paper, a qualitative analysis of non verbal cues in a group interaction is studied by using case study method. Two groups (age ranging from 18-19 years) of 66 students, 45 boys and 21 girls were studied. They were studied at different time intervals and in different setting. Two groups labeled A & B were made consisting of 33 students each. Further each group was randomly divided into 3 sub groups (11 students each) - A1, A2 & A3; B1, B2 & B3. Intentionally different topics were assigned to each group.

## III. CASE STUDY I

For group A, interaction started by assigning variant topics to groups A1, A2 & A3. Participants of group A1 & A2 were both boys and girls; whereas A3 group consisted only boys. There were certain non verbal cues which were more or less common to all the groups. Their Formal verbal introduction was accompanied by illustrators (mainly hand gestures) enforcing the speech and accentuating it. Initially the hands of the students were placed on the table, feet placed firmly under their chairs and their bodies open to reception, displaying responsive body posture. Emblems like head movements for 'yes' and 'no' were prominent throughout the interaction. Non participants interlocked their fingers closing themselves to the interaction. "Of all the parts of the human body that are used to transmit information, the eyes are the most important and can transmit the most subtle nuances" (Julius Fast, 1971). The students who had sufficient knowledge about the subject tried making eye contact with every member of the group whereas those with lesser information withdrew eye contact, giving a sign of submission. While perceptions of a communicator's credibility become more favorable with more frequent and appropriately longer eye contact, perceptions of distrust increase with the absence of eye contact (Hemsley & Dobb, 1978). It was also noticed that students who were overconfident about their subject knowledge and verbal speaking skills made little eye contact with other participants but more with the evaluator displaying their superiority over the others.

One difference that was noticed in the students of group A2 was that most of them were dressed in formal attire which brought about an added formality to their verbal interaction and projected immense confidence, competence and credibility. The affect of attire was visible in physical appearance and resulting perception. Studies suggest that physically attractive communicators are more persuasive (Chaiken, 1975),

successful in changing attitudes (Kahle & Homer, 1985) and are perceived as being more friendly than less attractive communicators.

As discussion proceeded there were many ideas to which everybody did not agree to, before verbal disagreement, their retaliation was visible through defiant cues, their postures became combative by leaning forward, hands getting raised and fingers pointing; clearly signaling disagreement with the speaker. Whenever we talk of gender differences, non verbal cues can also not ignore this aspect. There was a marked difference in the non verbal cues of group A3 which consisted of only boys. They had fixed facial expressions indicating lack of conformity, whereas the participants of the other two groups (mainly girls) had expressive facial expressions. It was also observed that during the combative interaction paralinguistic cues such as vocal pitch, vocal loudness, tone and speed of group A3 was more aggressive than the other two groups. During disagreements they displayed fugitive body posture, rejecting the communication by moving back, looking around and folding their arms and sometimes even banging on the table. These gestures were not seen in group A1 and A2. It was also noticed that during argumentation members of group A3 moved closer to each other asserting their views without any gender inhibitions. The distance reserved for acquaintances vary depending on cultural interpretation of distance (Jain & Choudhary, 2010).

Towards the end of the interaction, as one member was concluding verbally, the consensus was communicated by the other members through their non verbal cues (nodding of heads, facial agreements and relaxed body posture). Showing sensitivity and concern about time (chronemics) the interaction ended in the allotted time. Non verbal cues played vital role in shaping the group behavior.

## IV. CASE STUDY 2

On the same grounds, three sub groups of Group B also started their interaction on three different topics. Group B1 and B3 had almost equal no. of boys and girls whereas group B2 had more girls compared to boys. Eagerness of participation was visible through their open arms and hands at the onset of every interaction. They were completely engaged in the beginning, evident through their posture, they were leaning forward, pens down, and hands on the table. All the participants displayed responsiveness and enthusiasm by making eye contact with others. Members of the group, who had information on the topic but were not able to communicate due lack of vocabulary used hand gestures more frequently than the others and gave submissive amusing smiles when they fell short of appropriate language. Auberge and Cathiard (2003) showed that amused smiles carry much

more information than mechanical smiles. Smiles communicate different meanings and can relate to different underlying meanings. As the interaction progressed, it was noticed that the non performers tried to mask their lack of subject knowledge by giving deceptive facial expressions but refrained from making eye contact with the other group members and also displayed nervous hand and leg movements. Ekman and Friesen (1972) noted that expressive parts of the body which are regarded high in 'sending capacity' are easy to control and are less likely to allow deception leakage, whereas other parts like hands and legs are less controllable and hence emit more leakage than face.

In group B2, which consisted of more girls than boys, it was observed that girls were more assertive in their paralinguistic and body language compared to the other two groups. They displayed their leadership qualities through verbal and vocal cues, whereas the girls in the other two groups made use of occulesics (eye and facial movements) while asking their counterparts to give their views. The display of interpersonal warmth is more effectively communicated through non verbal channels (Sundaram and Webster, 2000).

It was observed that the participants who were seated in the center of the round table got an advantage of spatial arrangement. They projected more leadership traits as they had more communicative proximity with each member of the group whereas participants sitting on extreme corners displayed more paralinguistic cues such as vocal pitch, vocal loudness, tone and speed in order to give their opinion on the topic. Lack of proximity with the other members was posing a barrier to their effective verbal communication. Their fingers and hand gestures projected restlessness while waiting to participate in the interaction and used object adaptors (pens and pencils) to assert their views. It was with the aid of non verbal cues that even the participants sitting at a distance were able to convince others to their view point shaping consensus for the group.

As the interaction of group B3 extended beyond the allotted time, some members gave cues to others for concluding the interaction by use of artifacts (looking at their watches). They hurriedly gave an amicable conclusion to their interaction while their gestures displayed fugitive body posture.

## V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, non-verbal cues are very important in shaping the group interaction as has been observed in different groups across different settings and different timings. Nonverbal cues affect and get affected by the group dynamism. Cues of casual smiling, light laughter, forward body lean, open body posture, and frequent eye contact are perceived as

conveying intimacy and non dominance, the characteristics commonly associated with friendliness and courtesy (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). Non verbal signals are equally, perhaps more, important than verbal signals in persuasive communication. It is estimated that less than ten percent of interpersonal communication involves words, the remaining being made up of voice tone, sounds and a variety of devices such as kinetics (movement), haptics (touch), occulesics (eye-contact), proxemics (space) and chronemics (time) as well as posture, sound symbols and silence, which either replace or accompany words.

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