

Communication beyond Words and Language: Role of Five Senses

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Abstract

Communication has evolved and has been studied as the most important tool of interactions in personal as well as organisational life in the world. As we commonly understand communication as an interplay of words in a particular language, the present article attempts to answer the intriguing question about the origin of the communication and tries to understand its genesis at the metaphysical level. Words and language are representative of some inner thoughts and processes developed based on the perception created in human minds on the basis of what it perceives through sensory organs. The article highlights the role of five senses attributed to the human being in the communication that goes within the oneself. Author finds the root of the communication at ideation, thought and perception level by the interplay of various sense organs. Language oriented communication is just a minor dimension of the realm of communication that a human being experiences through eyes, ears, tongue, touch and nose. Further, author attempts to put the rationale that these five senses can't communicate effectively when they perform their role in solos rather the interaction amongst them adds contours to the non-verbal expressions and same is manifested through different body languages.

Keywords: Communication, Senses, Five senses

Introduction

The basic premise that “human beings are social in nature” remains valid for all groups of existence of humankind. Organisations do not make any exception to it. Based on the needs and purposes, there are interactions among various elements of the society or organisations. Organisational communication has been studied and elaborated by many scholars in terms of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication and hundreds of notes, books and materials are available to read through. Let us take a different approach to understand these phenomena.

The question that perturbed my thoughts to relate the communication through five senses was where the communication actually starts with. Is it always in a one to one or one to many scenarios to let communication take place? If this is true, what we will call the process that goes in our mind while we plan for our, when we prioritise the actions ahead first in our mind, when we talk to ourselves and when we feel talking to some other persons though he/she is never around (daydreaming or romeoting). Instigated by these thoughts and associated readings we will try to understand the communication through five senses.

B K Mishra, a Psychologist, in his book “Psychology: The Study of Human Behaviour” highlights two approaches to understand the world through sensory experiences: i) It relates to the aspects of environment to which the sense organs respond to by registering the information and conveying the registered information to the brain where integrative, interpretative and decision-making processes for making a response take place. ii) The other aims to determine man's ability to discriminate and interpret sensory stimuli so that one's capability can be matched to the task requirement. He further explains that sensation is a primary experience of knowing the world around us in which information about any objects (concrete or abstract) is gathered through receptor mechanisms present in the five basic sense organs. Sensory process involves a succession of events beginning with stimulation of receptors, encoding the message, transmission of the message in the form of nerve impulse and decoding the message by the sensory cortex of the brain. Here lies

a complete parallel mechanism between sensory process and communication process the difference being that the Sender is the Sense Organs where message ideates and is encoded, and brain is the final receiver decoding the coded message.

Gill & Adams, (1998) elaborates the encoding in the case of interpersonal communication. According to him, “encoder is the part of the brain (cortex) that controls the vocal mechanisms, hands and other muscles to transform impulses and feelings into utterances, gestures and writing.” He further states about the importance of encoding of the message even in the technology-based communication such as the Telegraph, the Telephone and the TV and concludes that “information cannot be transmitted in its original form” It has to be reconstructed in a different form to make use of the available channels. Here lies the importance of the sense organs and a reference point for the topic.

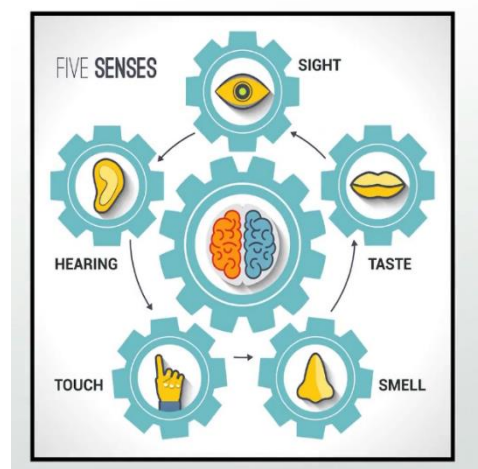
Five Sense Organs and its Role in Communication

Role of Eyes: Though the primary function of eyes is to see, it helps in many different ways during communication. It helps in reading the content of a text, image, videos etc. It has high importance in all face-to-face communication. Eyes help us in judging the depth, identifying the various colours (the different wavelengths of light) and letting us percept the nature. Whereas the eyes are the most important paraphernalia for all Verbal Communication (specially the written one) its importance increases four fold when it is supplemented with the eyebrows, eyelids and the pupils (its size and movement). The concrete meaning gets converted to abstract. The experience of this abstract is even beyond the scope of just the five senses. It conveys a whole range of messages such as expressing innermost feelings, excitement, surprises, fear etc. Eyes help you win the life partner or get the enemy of the life. There is a saying in Hindi “Aankhe thi jo kah gayi sab kuch, Lafz hote to mukar gaye hote (It were eyes, which told everything, had it been the words, it would have turned hostile)”. This establishes the supremacy of the Non-verbal communication over the verbal one.

Looking at somebody for a long time shows the intensity of our interest in him. If the eye contact is brief, or we take our eyes off the person very soon, it indicates nervousness or embarrassment on our part. Eyes, also play a major role in assessment of the feedback non-verbally. When a speaker addresses the other, it is the eye gesture of the other person that servers as feedback for the first person whether to continue with the process or cut it short due to non-involvement of the other person reflected through this eye contact or avoidance respectively.

Let’s look at the importance of the vision and visual signs (Non-verbal Communication) with some other areas of knowledge. The knowledge of the history and historical perspectives are reflected through paintings, scrawlings, murals and engravings found on the walls of ancient caves, temples and such other buildings. When we visit to such a monumental place, we get spell bound by the majesty of those arts rather than the engraved words which we can’t read in its original script and we don’t bother to read in the present script. They tell, us a lot about the tribes or races or, rulers or traders, their religion, their hunting or other adventurous deeds, their art and so on.

The observations should be correlated with a Chinese proverb that “A picture is worth a thousand words” and It validates the observation of Adair that “much of our information-more than 50 percent is received through the gateway of our eyes”. Posters and pictures, real-life drawings, cartoons, caricatures, statues and effigies are freely used for general information as also for business purposes. Maps and-diagrams are an essential part of a book of geography, science, economics and history in the same ways where the concepts are understood more comprehensively in visual form than in the paragraph stated therein.



In modern day to day life we come across a number of “universal signs” that is more worthy, abstract and convenient that is understood by anybody at anywhere. Signals at Traffic, Railway and Airport are frequently being used to communicate verbal context non-verbally.

Role of Ears: The primary function of ears is to listen to. It allows us to hear sound. The inner ear also helps us maintain balance and regulate sinus pressure which is better observed when a person moves on high altitude.

Like visual signals, Audio or sound signals have also been in use since the very beginning of civilization. Drum-beating is seen commonly being used in modern times to convey different kinds of feelings on different occasions / celebrations. Various kinds of alarm signals, fire alarms, accident/casualty alarms, ambulance alarm, and machine breakdown alarm are being used in modern day business activities. These alarms are manifested through various kinds of sirens, hooters, whistlers etc. The main idea is to caution the listener and take the right step. A few of them are also part of our household activities such as a clock alarm, a buzzer, doorbell etc. Thus, the administration and the world of business is conveniently using many audio-based alarms for its smooth functioning.



Let's understand its role in a dialogue-based communication which is a widespread form of Verbal (Oral) communication. Message encoded by the Sender during a dialogue reaches to the Receiver through these sense organs which stimulates the decoding mechanism and complete the process of communication. The formal and informal tone of Oral communication has many advantages (and a few disadvantages as well) in family, society or business organisation oriented communication, which we will be dealing in details during our discussions on communication through Tongue (represented through Mouth).

Ear helps in listening and listening is said to be the most efficient skill of communication. Ralph G. Nichols says, “The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.” The importance of listening extends far beyond academic and professional settings. It has its realm in one's day to day life, among friends, family, and business organisations. The reason for its far-reaching realm is that it fosters self-esteem, improves relationships, maximizes productivity and helps in becoming a better speaker. Listening, in itself, is a process.

Numerical supremacy of ears over mouth has been assigned by (Cain, 2012) and he says, “We have two ears and one mouth and we should use them proportionally.” We therefore will be taking guidance for improving our listening skills from “Ten commandments of Listening” as formulated by Keith Davis and John W. Newstrom and as mentioned below:

1. *Stop talking:* Generally, we are more interested in what we want to say than in what we are being told. So, we must stop talking before we listen.
2. *Put the talker at ease:* If the speaker is not at ease, he will not be able to do his job satisfactorily. So, it is very important for the listener/listeners to make the talker comfortable.
3. *Show the talker that you want to listen:* You should give the talker the impression that you are listening to him to understand rather than to oppose.
4. *Remove distractions:* Certain activities like tapping with a pen or pencil, shuffling papers or passing something along distracts the talker.
5. *Empathize with the talker:* We will be able to appreciate the point of view of the talker and build up a climate conducive to communication only if we place ourselves in the position of the talker.
6. *Be patient:* patience pays. Some talker gets to the point very quickly, while some take a lot more time. So, we should give enough time to the talker. We must not be tempted to interrupt.

7. *Hold your temper:* Anger is the worst enemy of communication as it builds walls among the participants in the communication event. It hardens their positions and blocks their minds to other's words.

8. *Go easy on argument and criticism:* Argument and criticism do not lead anywhere. On the other hand, argument and criticism put the talker on the defensive and make him angry.

9. *Ask questions:* Putting questions shows an open mind. It shows that you are listening. It shows that you are getting the message and also giving the feedback.

10. *Stop talking:* This is the last as well as the first commandment. All other commandments or rules of listening depend on it.

Role of Tongues: Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines tongue (~noun) as "the soft part in the mouth that moves around, used for tasting, swallowing, speaking etc.", as a "language" and as a ~verb it is defined as "to stop the flow of air into a wind instrument with your tongue in order to make a note". 'Note' here is different sounds in speech. The vocal function of tongue is equally important as its utility to taste foods. Thus, the tongue is the most important articulator of speech.



Communication in the mother tongue is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form. Oral and written form of communication is part of Verbal communication and therefore tongues get paramount importance in all aspects of Oral and Written communication i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing. The aspects of verbal communication interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way.

The interaction takes the dimension of full range of societal and cultural contexts through which the communicator (the Sender) interacts at his home, work and or leisure through family, society and organisation.

Both Written and Oral communication are very economical in terms of money and time. Just as the oral communication forms the essence of social life, so is the importance of written communication in the area of business or an organizational life. Language has its own rule of combining letters into words, words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs known as the Grammar. Phenomenally, while speech comes to us very naturally and spontaneously, writing comes after serious practice and careful organization of thought. As people in the organisation function within defined limits of authority and responsibility, written communication makes it easy to determine the responsibilities of the people.

The tongue is the most important articulator of speech. ***The power of the tongue lies not only in what we say, but "how" we say it.*** Words are made of syllables and syllables have their own vibrations. Thus, words spoken or heard shift our vibration. This vibration stimulates beliefs and action. The majority of conflict (interpersonal, in relation or in office), therefore, comes from what we say and how others perceive them.

Study of mother-tongue based literature or that of English as a second language from Kindergarten till Secondary and/or Grad School has great importance in teaching how to effectively use words to create a varied, rich and meaningful life. One who are taught it transforms in an adult who understands self and help build up others. On the contrary those who lack it suffers throughout his life and lives in an isolated, disgusted, distrusted self. Thus, need arises about how to change people's behavior through words and actions and reading of a book "***Win friends and influence people***" by Dale Carnegie is suggested for the purpose.



Role of Touch: Touch appears to be most neglected yet responsible for many of the important senses in the human body. Biologically, the skin performs a huge number of functions such as keeping the body cool through perspiration, sensing what's in contact with our bodies and as a protective layer from various

external elements. The question is whether it performs any function related to communication. Superficially, it appears that it has probably no role in communication. Let us try to understand it, on the basis of a fact that biologically, touch is the first sense human develops even before leaving the womb.

A study has been conducted on “The Communicative Functions of Touch in Humans, Nonhuman Primates, and Rats” (Hertenstein et al., 2007). He makes use of the concept that “Touch, as well as other means of nonverbal communication, is thought to have phylogenetic and ontogenetic primacy” and tries to arrive at a definition of “touch and communication” (Burgoon, et.al, 1996). Brief meaning of the phylogenetic and ontogenetic primacy is that importance of non-verbal communication (including touch) precedes verbal communication. As visual acuity is limited in the early months of Infancy touch plays a central role in the communication of emotion in infants. Among adults, touch plays a fundamental and important role in human interaction. This interaction includes gaining of compliance, the communication of status and power, intimacy, hedonics, and liking.

Participants were exposed to 12 different types of emotions, and he found that they were effectively using 8 emotions out of 12. He observed that touch is a better way of conveying emotions than facial expressions and voice. Though, there is a very clear and quick communication of the conscious touch, yet it communicates subconsciously as well.

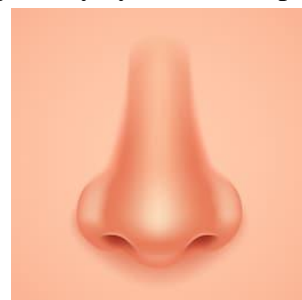
Let us now look at how we can improve our non-verbal communication more effectively by incorporating “Touch” into our lives. Guidelines for use of touch must not be taken for granted in all cases rather it needs to be judged based on the prevalent socio-cultural, geo environmental acceptability towards touch to the same sex or opposite sex people.

1. **To Praise – Give a Pat on the Back:** You can increase a person’s feeling of accomplishment by giving them a pat on the back when you tell them they’ve done a good job.
2. **Use of Handshakes:** A good handshake makes a lot more sense. It helps build trust between two people and works as a tool to ease cardiovascular stress. However, geo-environmental scenario due to outburst of Covid-19 virus after December 2019 it has been discarded across the world and “Namaste (both palms put together)” has taken the vogue.
3. **Use of Touch to Build Co-operative Relationships:** In a situation when you plan to ask someone for help, to change their behaviour or consider your viewpoint, try to find a way to work in discreet physical contact with them. The other person may not even realize that you touched them, but it will register subconsciously and create a bond.
4. **Type of Touch or Area of touch:** Location of touch is very sensitive and touch at inappropriate location may breach the modesty of the person. Touch, in general, should be kept at the back or arm from shoulder to hand and it should be brief because prolonged touch may be understood as threatening or creepy.

The world is working on Haptics Communication (science of Touch) and will be used in devices for communicating with someone else.

Role of Nose: The most protruding part of the face, nose is a part of the body's respiratory system. It helps in the function of sensing the smell and in the function of speech (Nasal Vowels and Nasal Consonants).

It appears that Nose has literally no role in communication, but studies show the result differently. Based on an experiment (of underarm odors of happy and afraid mood) conducted by Chen D. of Monell Chemical Senses Center, USA it has been observed that there is a significant indication of emotional state based on information found in human body odors. These information and indication correlate and emerges in a varied human perception and interaction.



Gün Semin, Ph.D., and colleagues from Utrecht University, Netherlands writes about his study in the journal *Psychological Science*. They contradict the common *assumption of human communication happening exclusively through language and visual cues* and suggest that “chemo-signals act as a medium” through which people can be “emotionally synchronized” outside of conscious awareness. Here lies the base for the embodied social-communication model in which Nose performs its crucial role in olfactory communication.

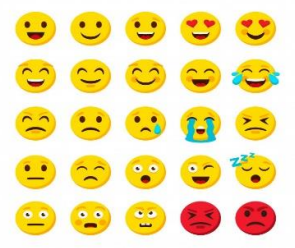


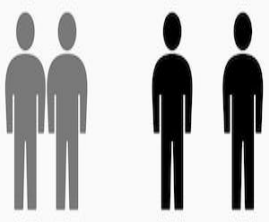

Richard L Doty (1981) has evaluated the reports in his article on “Olfactory communication in humans” that “humans can detect individuality, gender, and reproductive state” from olfactory cues and “odors are involved in producing menstrual synchrony and other phenomena”. He finds that both anatomic and behavioral studies support the notion that humans have the ability to communicate biological information via odors.

Communication within the senses or beyond the senses:

Before moving further, let me ask you a question. From the description of roles of all five senses in communication, which sense organs is used / more effective in communication? I presume your answer one of three sense organs discussed in order, i.e., eyes or ears or tongue. So, my next question is how do a blind, deaf and dumb communicate? Do they communicate at all or they never communicate? Answer to my first question lies in the answer of my second question. It is said (is proved for that purpose) that the blind, deaf and dumb are specially aided people whose communication is far better, efficient and effective than all normal human beings with all the five senses. It is not an individual sense organ that perform Written / Oral, Non-verbal / Verbal communication rather more than one sense organs perform to meet the objective of communication ideated in the mind of the Sender and received in the mind of the Receiver. It can, therefore, be deciphered that all these five senses can't communicate effectively when they perform their role in solos. It is an interaction amongst them that empowers the communication to effective and efficient. How do these senses interact, then?

Different permutation and combination of these five senses along with some other attributes such as Facial Expression, Gestures, Postures, Appearance, Space, Time, Environment in general etc. interplays to constitute the Body Language that catalyses verbal communication non-verbally. A few of the body languages are summarised in the tabular format hereunder and it is believed that learning communication by utilising one's own five resources will help in fulfilling the communication gap within an organisation as well as will help in building a team towards attainment of the set objectives of the organisation.

Understanding Body Language

Type	What it is	Doable / Not doable observation
<p style="text-align: center;">Facial expression</p> 	<p>During face-to-face communication The feeling deep within is reflected in the face. Happiness, surprise, fear, anger, sadness, etc. get reflected on the face. Thoughts and feelings conveyed may be +ve or - ve. Behaviour/expression can be changed or controlled only by the inner nature.</p>	<p>Self-notice - the way we speak, move, stand etc. Avoid stiff and too loose posture.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Gestures</p> 	<p>The physical movements of arms, legs, hands, torso and head are called gestures. Conveys meaning without using words. Gestures may mean 'OK', 'nervous' 'intense' etc. Gestures are observed with reference to Time. It always compliments the verbal communication.</p>	<p>Avoid playing with hair, ear, paperweight or a pen. Care in doing handshake –</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Posture</p> 	<p>“Hold your head high” – brings Self Respect and Confidence. Leaning forward or backward, standing or sitting erect - these postures cast an immediate impression on the other person’s mind. Nodding of head sideways / back & forth conveys the intended meaning better than words</p>	<p>“Whom & When” “Firm or Loose” Prefer a direct eye contact (prolonged or shorter means differently)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Space</p> 	<p>The space between two persons while communicating, generally depends on the intimacy or closeness between them. Maintain proper space’ depending on the relationship, which could be formal or informal or the closeness with the person with whom you are talking</p>	<p>Avoid showing impatience and close off signs. Body language changes meaning as per different cultural background.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Appearance</p> 	<p>Appearance includes - clothing, hair, jewellery, cosmetics, shoes, hair style, perfume etc. These are meaningfully related to our face, eyes, gestures, posture etc. It is said a man is known his “dress & address”. Dress speaks about - attitude to life, work, colleagues etc. Address here means the way a person speaks to others.</p>	<p>Be open to accept first and analyse, later on, to discard.</p>

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