

# Body Language

## The Most Effective Nonverbal Communication

**Ms. Vijaya Chakravarty**

Associate Professor, (English & Soft Skills) Department of Applied sciences  
Rajasthan Institute of Engineering & Technology  
Bhankrota, Jaipur

**Abstract-** *Body Language is jam packed with interesting theories. In this comprehensive overview the basics of body language can be perceived, how to read other's body language, and how to improve one's own.*

*When one talks about body language we look at the delicate cues we send and receive to each other nonverbally. A lot of people want to know how to study body language. To start with, body language can be broken down into a few different channels.*

**Keywords-** Body language, Gesture, Posture, verbal and Non-verbal Communication.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Body language mentions the nonverbal signals that you use to connect your feelings and purposes. It includes your pose, your face expressions, and your hand gesticulations.

The ability to understand and to interpret body language one can help you to pick up on unspoken issues, problems or negative feelings that other people might have. You can also use it in an encouraging way to add power to your voiced messages.

#### A. How to read people's Body Language

**Decoding** is your ability to read people's cues. It is how you interpret hidden emotions, information and character sketch from someone's nonverbal message.

**Encoding** is your aptitude to send cues to other people. This is how you regulate your own labeling, what first impression you give and how you make people feel when they are with you.

#### B. How to Read Negative Body Language

Being aware of negative body language in others can allow you to pick up on mis-understood issues or bad feelings. So, here

are some highlights which tell about negative nonverbal signals that one should look out for-

#### Facial Expressions

##### Body Proxemics (gestures - postures)

##### Dress sense.

Body language indicates about the nonverbal signals that are used to communicate. As some experts have talked about, these nonverbal signals make up a large part of daily communication. Starting with our facial expressions to our body movements, the things we *don't* say can still convey volumes of information.

It is said that body language may be responsible for 50% to 70% of all our communication, which is a lot more than verbal communication. To understand the body language of human beings is important, but it is also essential to pay attention to other cues such as context. In some instances, you should look at signals as a group rather than focusing on a single action.

Following are some of the things to look for when you're trying to interpret body language.

Think for a instant about how much an individual is able to express with just a facial expression. A smile can indicate approval or happiness. A frown can signal disapproval or unhappiness. There are instances when our facial expressions may reveal our true feelings about a particular situation. While one says that he is feeling fine, the look on his face may tell people otherwise.

Just a few examples of emotions that can be expressed via facial expressions include:

- Happiness
- Sadness
- Anger
- Surprise
- Disgust
- Fear
- Confusion

- Excitement
- Desire
- Contempt
- The expression on a person's face can even help determine if we trust or believe what the individual is saying. One study found that the most trustworthy facial expression involved a slight raise of the eyebrows and a slight smile. This expression, the researchers suggested, conveys both friendliness and confidence.
- Facial expressions are also among the most universal forms of body language. The expressions used to convey fear, anger, sadness, and happiness are similar throughout the world. Experts have found support for the universality of a variety of facial expressions tied to particular emotions including joy, anger, fear, surprise, and sadness.
- Research even suggests that we make judgments about people's intelligence based upon their faces and expressions. One study found that individuals who had narrower faces and more prominent noses were more likely to be perceived as intelligent. People with smiling, joyful expression were also judged as being more intelligent than those with angry expressions.

## The Eyes

The eyes are often referred to as the "mirror of the soul" since they are capable of showing a great deal about what a person is feeling or thinking. As you connect in conversation with another person, taking note of eye movement is a natural and important part of the communication process. Some common things you may notice include whether people are making direct eye contact or avoiding their gaze, how much they are blinking, or if their pupils are dilated.

When we evaluate body language, we pay attention to the following eye signals:

- **Eye gaze:** When a person looks directly into your eyes while having a conversation, it shows that they are interested and paying attention. However, long-drawn-out eye contact can feel hostile. On the other hand, breaking eye contact and frequently looking away might point to that the person is unfocused, uncomfortable, or trying to hide his or her real feelings.
- **Blinking:** Blinking is normal, but you should also notice to whether a person is blinking too much or too little. People often blink more quickly when they are feeling distraught or tight. Infrequent blinking may

indicate that a person is deliberately trying to control his or her eye movements. For example, a poker player might blink less frequently because he is intentionally trying to appear indifferent about the hand he was dealt.

- **Pupil size:** Pupil size can be a very delicate nonverbal communication signal. While light levels in the surroundings control pupil dilation, sometimes emotions can also cause small changes in pupil size. For example, you may have heard the phrase "bedroom eyes" used to portray the look someone gives when they are fascinated to another person. Highly dilated eyes, for example, can point out that a person is paying attention or even aroused.

### 1) The Mouth

Expressions of the mouth and related activities can also be essential in reading body language. For instance, to chew on the bottom lip may show that the person is experiencing feelings of worry, fear, or anxiety.

Covering one's mouth may be an attempt to be well-mannered if the person is yawning or coughing, but it may also be an attempt to cover up a frown of disapproval. Smiling is possibly one of the most important body language signals, but smiles can also be interpreted in many ways. A smile may be genuine, or it may be used to express false happiness, sarcasm, or even cynicism.

When we evaluate body language, we should pay attention to the following mouth and lip signals:

- **Pursed lips:** thinning the lips might be a pointer of distaste, disapproval, or distrust.
- **Biting of Lips:** People sometimes purse and bite on their lips when they are concerned, anxious, or stressed.
- **Covering of the mouth:** When people want to conceal a disturbing reaction, they might cover their mouths in order to avoid showing smiles, anxiety or smirks
- **Turned upwards or downwards:** minor changes in the mouth can also be delicate indicators of what a person is feeling. When the mouth is slightly upturned, it might mean that the person is feeling happy or positive. On the other hand, a slightly down-turned mouth can be an indicator of sadness, disapproval, or even an outright grimace.

## Gestures

Gestures of human beings can be some of the most undeviating and clear body language signals. Waving out, pointing with a finger, and using the fingers to indicate numerical amounts are all very familiar and easy to understand gestures. Some gestures may be cultural, however, so giving a thumbs-up or a peace sign in another country might have a completely different meaning than it does in the United States.

Here are just a few common gestures and their probable meanings:

- **A clenched fist** can point out anger or frustration in some situations or unity in others.
- **To show thumbs up and thumbs down** are often used as gestures of approval and disapproval.

Some Gestures can be most direct and obvious body language signals. Waving, pointing, and using the fingers to indicate numerical amounts are all very common and easy to understand gestures. Some gestures may be cultural, however, so giving a thumbs-up or a peace sign in another country might have a completely different meaning than it does in the United States.

The following examples are just a few common gestures and their possible meanings:

- **A clenched fist** can indicate anger in some situations or solidarity in others.
- **A thumbs up and thumbs down** are often used as gestures of approval and disapproval.

Arms and legs can also be used in transmitting nonverbal information. Crossing the arms can indicate defensiveness. Legs crossed away from another person may indicate dislike or discomfort with that individual.

Other delicate signals such as expanding the arms widely may be an attempt to seem larger or more powerful while keeping the arms close to the body may be an attempt to reduce oneself or pull out from attention.

When you are evaluating body language, pay attention to some of the following signals that the arms and legs may convey:

- **Crossed arms** might indicate that a person feels defensive, self-protective, or closed-off.
- **Standing straight with hands placed on the hips** can be a sign that a person is ready and in control, or it can also possibly be a sign of aggressiveness.

- **While clasping the hands behind the back** might indicate that a person is feeling bored, anxious, or even angry.
- **To tap fingers rapidly or fidgeting** constantly can be a sign that a person is bored, impatient, or frustrated.
- **Sitting crossed legs** can point to that a person is feeling closed off or in need of solitude.

## 2) Posture

The way we hold our bodies can also serve as an important part of body language. The term *posture* refers to how we hold our bodies as well as the overall physical form of an individual. Posture can convey a wealth of information about how a person is feeling as well as hints about personality characteristics, such as whether a person is confident, open, or submissive.

Sitting up straight, for example, may indicate that a person is focused and paying attention to what's going on. Sitting with the body bent forward, can imply that the person is bored or indifferent.

While trying to read body language, attempt to notice some of the signals that a person's posture can send.

- **Open posture shows** keeping the trunk of the body open and exposed. This posture indicates friendliness, openness, and willingness.
- **Closed posture** indicates with hiding the trunk of the body often by hunching forward and keeping the arms and legs crossed. This type of posture can indicate hostility, unfriendliness, and anxiety.

## 3) Personal Space

*Proxemics* refers to the distance between people as they interact. Body movements and facial expressions can communicate a great deal of nonverbal information, also the physical space between individuals.

Experts have described four levels of social distance that occur in different situations:

- **Close distance— 6 to 18 inches:** This level of physical distance often indicates a closer relationship or greater comfort between individuals. It generally occurs during intimate contact such as hugging, whispering, or touching.
- **Individual distance— 1.5 to 4 feet:** Physical distance at this level generally occurs between people who are family members or close friends. The nearer the

people can happily stand while interacting can be an indicator of the level of intimacy in their relationship.

- **Societal distance— 4 to 12 feet:** This level of physical distance is often used with individuals who are acquaintances. With a person you know quite well, such as a co-worker you see several times a week, you might feel more comfortable interacting at a closer distance. In some instances where you do not know the other person well, such as a postal delivery driver you only see once a month, a distance of 10 to 12 feet may feel more comfortable.
- **Community distance— 12 to 25 feet:** Physical distance at this level is often used in public speaking situations. To Talk in front of a class full of students or giving a presentation at work is good examples of such situations.

To put it simply, body language is the silent element of communication that is used to reveal true feelings and emotions.

When we "read" these signs, we can use it to our advantage. For instance, it can help us to understand the **complete** message of what someone is trying to say to us, and to enhance our awareness of people's reactions to what **we** say and do.

We can also use it to adjust our own body language so that we appear more positive, engaging and approachable.

#### 4) *Difficult Conversations and Defensiveness*

Complicated or tense conversations are an uncomfortable fact of life at work. Maybe you've had to deal with a difficult customer, or needed to talk to someone about his or her poor performance. Or maybe you've negotiated a major contract.

Ideally, these situations would be resolved calmly. But, often they are complex feelings of apprehension, anxiety, defensiveness, or even anger. Though we may try to hide these feelings but they often show through in our body language.

For example, if someone is indicating one or more of the following behaviors, he will likely be detached, disinterested or unhappy:

- Arms folded in front of the body.
- Negligible or tense facial expression.
- Body turned away from you.
- Eyes downcast, maintaining little contact.

Being aware of these signs which can help you to adjust what you say and how you say it, so you can make him feel more at ease and receptive to your lookout.

#### 5) *Avoiding Unengaged Audiences*

When we deliver a presentation, or collaborate in a cluster, you want the people around you to be 100 percent engaged.

These signs show that people may be bored or disinterested:

- Sitting slumped, with heads downcast.
- Gazing at something else, or into space.
- Fidgeting, arranging clothes, or fiddling with pens and phones.
- Writing or doodling.

When you notice that someone is detached, you're in a better position to do something about it. For example, you can re-engage her by asking her a direct question, or by inviting her to contribute an idea of her own.

#### C. *How to Project Positive Body Language*

When you use positive body language, it can add strength to the verbal messages or ideas that you want to convey, and help you to avoid sending mixed or confusing signals.

In this section, we'll describe some basic postures that you can adapt to project self-confidence and openness.

#### 1) *Making a Confident First Impression*

These instructions can help you to adjust your body language so that you make a great first impression:

- **Have an open posture.** Be relaxed, but don't slouch! Sit or stand straight and place your hands by your sides. Do not stand with your hands on your hips, as this will make you appear larger, which can communicate aggression or a desire to dominate.
- **Use a firm handshake.** But don't get carried away! You don't want it to become uncomfortable or, worse, sore for the other person. If it happens, you'll likely come across as rude or violent.
- **Maintain good eye contact.** Try to hold the other person's gaze for a few seconds at a time. This will show that you're sincere and engaged. But, avoid turning it into a staring match!

- **Avoid touching your face.** There's a common belief that people who touch their faces while answering questions are being dishonest. Well this is not the truth, all the same, it's best to avoid fiddling with your hair or touching your mouth or nose, particularly if your aim is to come across as trustworthy.

## 2) Public Speaking

Optimistic body language can also help you to engage people, to cover presentation nerves, and to project confidence when you speak in public. A few tips that can help you to do this:

- **Have a positive posture.** Always sit or stand straight, with your shoulders back and your arms unfolded and at your sides or in front of you. Don't be tempted to put your hands in your pockets, or to slouch, as this will make you look disinterested.
- **Keep your head up.** Your head should be upright and level. Inclining too much forward or backward can make you look aggressive or arrogant.
- **Practice and perfect your posture.** If you have practiced your presentation beforehand, so why not practice your body language, too? Always stand in a relaxed manner, with your weight evenly distributed. Keep one foot slightly in front of the other – this will help you to maintain your posture.
- **Use open hand gestures.** Spread your hands apart, in front of you, with your palms facing slightly toward your audience. This shows enthusiasm to converse and to share ideas. Keep your upper arms close to your body. Try to avoid over expression, or people may pay more attention to your hands than to what you're saying.

## 3) Interviews, Negotiations and Reflection

Body language also helps you to stay calm in situations where emotions have the potential to run high – a negotiation , for example, or a performance review . The following tips may be used to defuse tension and demonstrate openness:

- **Use mirroring.** If you can, delicately reflect the body language of the person you're talking to. This should make him feel more comfortable, and you can build rapport

Don't copy **every** gesture that he makes, as this will likely make him feel uneasy, or that you're not taking him seriously.

Relax **your body**. It may not be easy to keep emotions at a distance, particularly in nerve-wracking situations such as an

interview or assessment. But you can preserve the look of calm by keeping your hands still, and by avoiding fidgeting with your hair or touching your face.

Look **interested**. As suggested above, touching your face or mouth can signal dishonesty, it can also demonstrate that you're thinking. So, if you are asked a difficult question, it's OK to briefly touch your cheek or stroke your chin. This will show the other person that you're contemplating on your answer before you respond

Negative body language includes:

- Folded arms.
- Tense facial expression.
- Body turned away from you.
- Poor eye contact.

Positive body language includes:

- Open body position (arms unfolded).
- Upright posture.
- Relaxed and open facial expression.
- Arms hanging relaxed by the sides.
- Regular eye contact.

## II. CONCLUSION

To understand the body language one can go a long way toward helping better communicate with others and interpreting what others might be trying to convey.

While it may be appealing to select apart signals one by one, it's important to look at these nonverbal signals in relation to verbal communication, other nonverbal signals, and the situation. You can also focus on learning more and improve your nonverbal communication to become better at letting people know what you are feeling without even saying a word.

## REFERENCES

- [1] About Nonverbal Communications – Different categories of nonverbal communication, along with a detailed list of signals. (Adam Blatner, M.D.)
- [2] The Importance of Nonverbal Communication (PDF) – by Edward G. Wertheim, Ph.D. about the communication process. (Northeastern University)
- [3] The Definitive Book of Body Language, by Barbara Pease & Allan Pease
- [4] How to win friends and influence people by Dale Carnegie

- [5] The Body Language Bible, By Judi James
- [6] What everybody is saying, By Joe Navarro.