

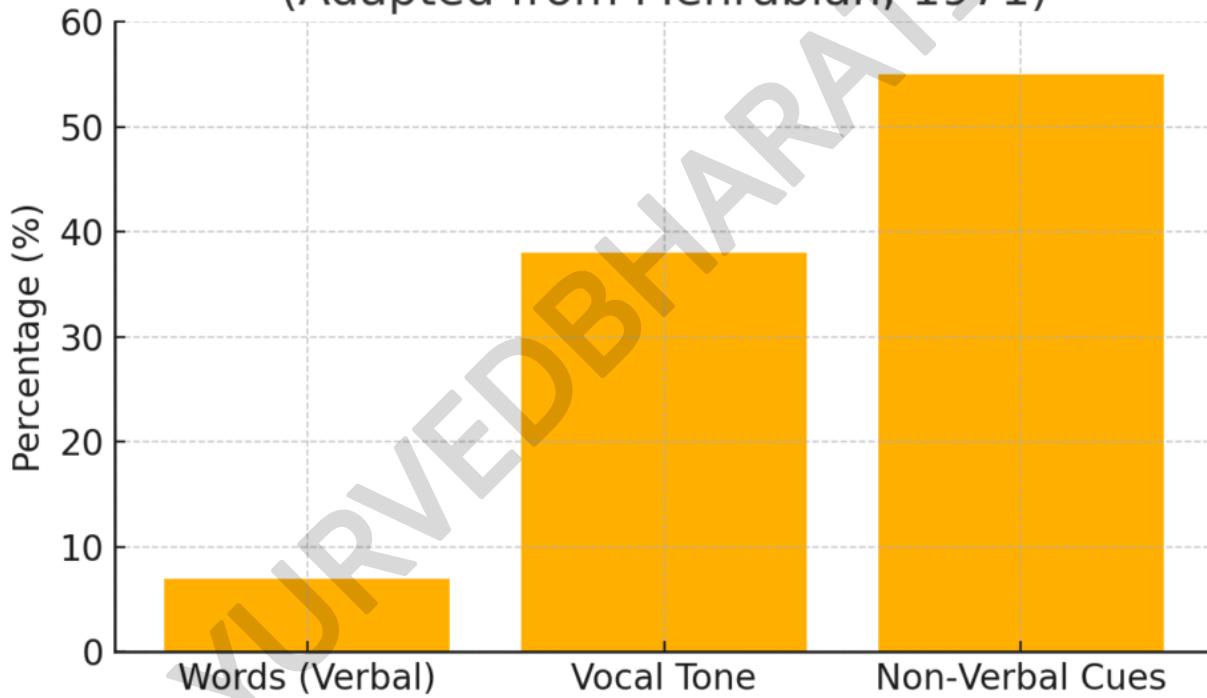
Unit 3: Non-Verbal Communication

Non-Verbal Communication

1 Importance of Non-Verbal Communication

While spoken words convey explicit meaning, non-verbal cues frame *how* the message is received. Research on “silent language” shows that listeners form first impressions within the first 7-10 seconds; congruent non-verbal behaviour increases trust, retention, and persuasive power, whereas incongruence triggers doubt and cognitive dissonance. The accompanying bar chart (adapted from Mehrabian, 1971) illustrates a widely cited distribution in which **55 % of meaning is attributed to visible behaviour, 38 % to vocal tone, and only 7 % to the literal words**. Use this heuristic cautiously—it applies mainly to messages about attitudes or emotions—but it highlights the weight carried by what is *unspoken*.

Relative Contribution to Overall Message Understanding (Adapted from Mehrabian, 1971)



2 Types of Non-Verbal Cues

Category	Physiological Channel	Core Functions	Typical Examples	Common Misinterpretations
Body language (Kinesics)	Muscles & joints	Regulates flow, indicates openness/defensiveness	Leaning forward, crossed arms, mirroring	Crossed arms = cold room, not hostility
Facial expressions	Facial muscles, micro-movements	Conveys emotion spectrum; offers immediate feedback	Genuine (Duchenne) smile, furrowed brow	Confusing cultural “mask” smiles with agreement
Gestures	Hands, arms	Illustrates size/direction, emphasises points	Illustrators, emblems (OK sign), adapters (pen-clicking)	“Thumbs-up” positive in India, rude in parts of ME

Category	Physiological Channel	Core Functions	Typical Examples	Common Misinterpretations
Eye contact (Oculesics)	Pupillary response, gaze	Signals attention, dominance, honesty	Direct gaze 3-5 sec, soft focus while thinking	Prolonged gaze = sincerity or aggression, varies by culture

Mnemonic: “**K-F-G-O**” (Kinesics, Facial, Gestural, Oculesic) helps recall the four primary visible channels.

3 Posture, Appearance & Personal Space

- **Posture:** An erect but relaxed stance communicates confidence and readiness; slumped shoulders may denote fatigue or disinterest.
- **Appearance:** Dress, grooming, and accessories prime perceptions of professionalism and credibility; in healthcare, clean attire and neutral colours foster patient trust.
- **Proxemics (Personal Space):** Edward T. Hall's zones—Intimate (< 45 cm), Personal (45 cm-1.2 m), Social (1.2-3.6 m), Public (> 3.6 m)—shift with culture; e.g., Indian norms allow closer conversational distance than Scandinavian norms. Violating these boundaries can evoke anxiety or withdrawal.

4 Interpreting Cues Across Cultures

Non-verbal “vocabularies” are culturally coded:

- **High-context societies** (e.g., Japan) rely heavily on subtle kinesic and contextual signals; silence can signal respect rather than dissent.
- **Low-context societies** (e.g., Germany) favour explicit verbal clarity; strong eye contact shows honesty.
- **Gesture pitfalls:** The same hand sign may convey approval, insult, or numeric value in different regions. Always triangulate verbal confirmation, and when in doubt, adopt neutral gestures and observe local models.

5 Using Non-Verbal Communication Effectively

1. **Synchronise channels** – Align facial affect, tone, and words to prevent mixed messages.
2. **Adopt open posture** – Uncrossed arms, visible palms, and balanced stance invite engagement.
3. **Employ intentional gestures** – Use illustrators to map structure (e.g., counting points on fingers); avoid distractors like pocket jingling.
4. **Modulate eye contact** – Maintain steady gaze in 3-second bursts; break periodically to reduce intimidation.
5. **Respect space & touch** – Gauge context before entering personal zones or using haptics such as handshakes.
6. **Monitor feedback loops** – Mirror the audience’s positive micro-expressions and adjust when signs of confusion (tilted head, furrowed brow) appear.

Quick-Reference Summary

Dimension	Do	Avoid
Body stance	Square shoulders, weight balanced	Slouching, pointing feet toward exit
Facial affect	Genuine smiles, expressive eyebrows	Inconsistent smile, eye-rolls
Gestures	Purposeful, above waist	Fidgeting, pocketed hands
Eye contact	40-60 % of interaction time	Staring or rapid darting
Space & touch	Match cultural norms, ask consent	Unsolicited pats, crowding

By integrating these strategies, the communicator reinforces spoken content, reduces ambiguity, and builds rapport—turning the “silent language” into a powerful ally in every professional exchange.