

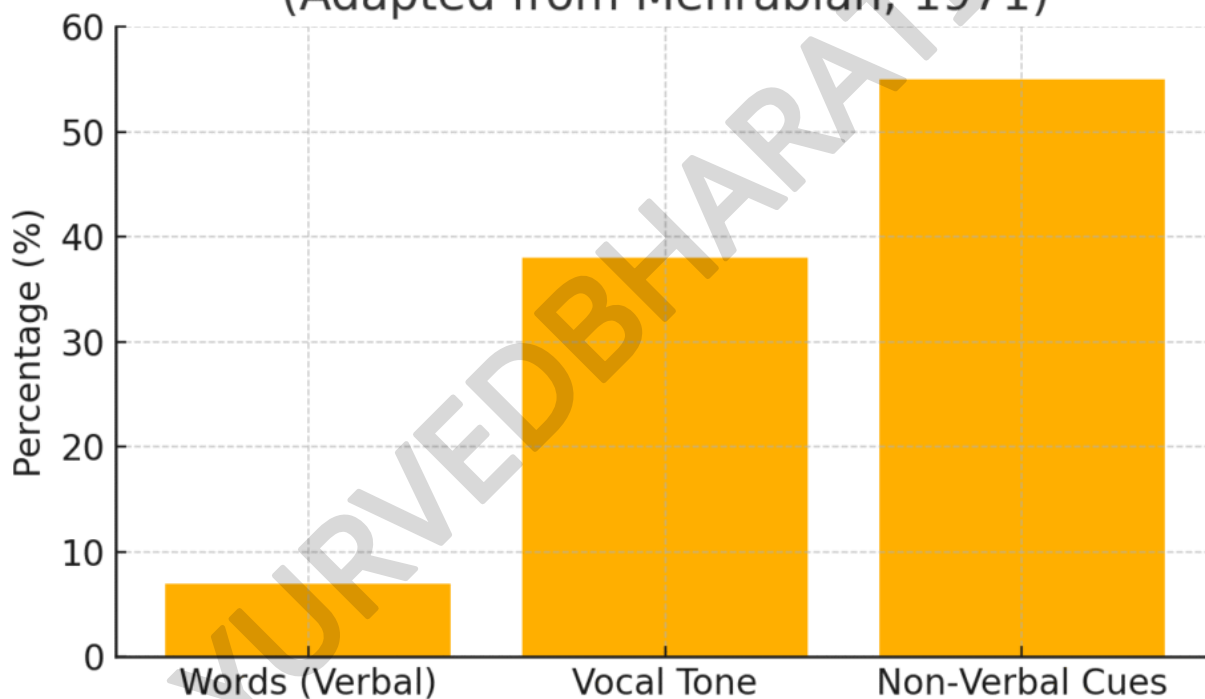
Unit 3: Non-Verbal Communication

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 (Oculusics)	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, Oculusic) 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.