
UNIT 5 VERBAL AND NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

- to understand that communication, often understood mainly as verbal communication, can also be non-verbal,
- to understand some features of verbal communication in the oral and written modes,
- to understand some features of non-verbal communication: signs, symbols, gestures and body language, and
- to consider some barriers to communication

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss various means of communication, i.e. through different modes. It is important to note that communication can be through words, oral or written but also through other means. Most of our communication is supplemented by body language and it is this that adds effect to our oral communication. They you might wonder which mode is better. The answer is – all modes are good, but we should know when to use what. In the following sections we will talk about the advantages 'of' each mode and the occasions for their use.

5.2 ONE WAY COMMUNICATION AND TWO WAY COMMUNICATION

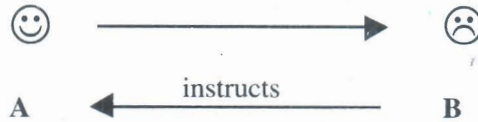
All communication involves a flow of information. One-way communication informs the receiver but does not receive any response. When a person is physically far off, and there is no medium to facilitate communication, only one way communication is possible. Someone talking over a megaphone from the edge of a big ship can communicate with people in a small boat down below. No response is possible in such cases. But such communication comes under the category of 'transmission' rather than 'communication'. In this type of communication there is the grave danger of one's seeing what they want to see.

But sometimes, we do not require any response either. School bells, factory sirens, traffic signals come under this category and they are quite effective. But one way communication between two or more persons has the danger of being understood wrongly.

Two way communication is an exchange of information and ideas. Most of the time we engage in two way communication. This develops understanding. Two way communication is like a seesaw. We need the active participation of both the participants. Otherwise there is no play. It would be like trying to clap with one hand. Some people, especially teachers, make the mistake of transmitting information rather than communicating with the students. Of course, several politicians do so too.

The following is an illustration of such mismatches in communication process.

One Way communication

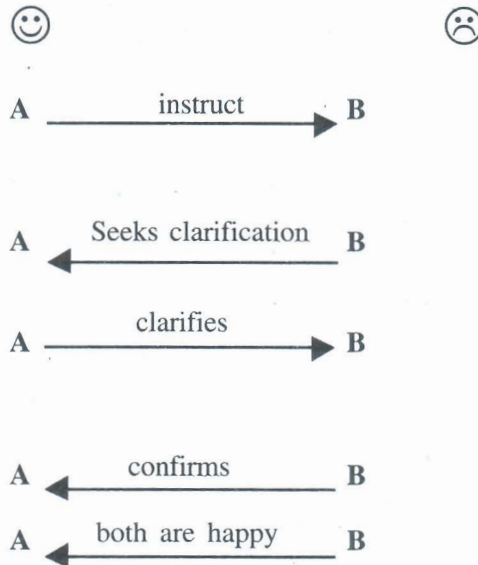


B does not understand properly.

B wants clarifications, he has questions to ask.

A does not realize this.

Two Way communication



5.3 VERBAL COMMUNICATION: ORAL AND WRITTEN MODES

Communication is often understood mainly as verbal communication. But it is also possible knowledge, as we shall see in the next section.

Verbal communication is communication through words. This can occur in either of two modes, oral or written. Oral communication is more natural and spontaneous, and we use this mode most of the time. A great percentage of our communication is oral communication. But in formal situations, written communication is required, and not everyone can communicate effectively in writing. This may be because of psychological barriers, or lack of technique. We will discuss these barriers to effective communication a little later.

It is important to understand which mode to select for communicating effectively. Let's first discuss where the oral and written modes are effectively used, and where a combination of the two is required.

5.3.1 The Oral Mode is Used Where

- Personal authentication is needed. e.g., between an officer and her personal secretary; a journalist and her source ("I heard it from a reliable source")
- Social or gregarious needs must be met. e.g., speaking with a visiting delegation

- Warmth and personal qualities are called for. e.g., group or team interaction
- Exactitude and precision are not vitally important. e.g., brain-storming for ideas
- Situations demand maximum understanding. e.g., sorting out problems or differences between individuals, or between two groups such as administration and students.
- An atmosphere of openness is desired. e.g., talks between management and workers
- Added impact is needed to get receiver focus. e.g., a chairperson of an organization addressing the staff; a presidential or royal address to a nation
- Decisions or information have to be communicated quickly. e.g., officers issuing orders during natural disasters such as floods or an earthquake
- Confidential matters are to be discussed. e.g., exchange of positive or negative information about an organization or an individual. In the process of appointments, or promotion or selection of individuals, a period of open discussion may precede the final decision that is recorded in writing.

5.3.2 The Written Mode is Used Where

- Information has to be stored and retrieved. e.g., official records
- The reliability and validity of an idea are important. e.g., decisions taken by a group, to be acted upon
- The verification and authentication of an idea are important. e.g., a memo from a superior about new accounting practices
- Objective references are important. e.g., a research article or informative article
- Written communication supplements oral communication. e.g., the minutes of a meeting
- Crucial decisions and actions are to be considered. e.g., plans and proposals
- Communication is subject to review and reconsideration. e.g., goals, performance appraisals
- Personal presence is not required. e.g., circulating a list of holidays for organizations to choose from; routine good wishes at the new year
- The communicator needs to extend himself in time and space. e.g., a letter from a company head to all its branches in a country, or around the world

Go home tonight and put your great idea on paper. If you can't do that, then you haven't really thought it out.

– Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defence in the Kennedy administration

... the discipline of writing something down is the first step toward making it happen. In conversation, you can get away with all kinds of vagueness and nonsense, often without realizing it. – Lee Iacocca, president of the American car companies Ford and Chrysler

5.3.3 Where Both Modes are Used

- When people are expected to ‘carry home’ ideas. *e.g. after a brain-storming session, individuals or teams are asked to develop plans*
- When follow-up activities are necessary. *e.g. after a consultative meeting*
- When optimal understanding is needed. *e.g. a joint communiqué about international trade agreements*
- When both clarity and impact are needed. *e.g. a new product is launched in the market*
- When the presentation is exploratory. *e.g. a team member presents ideas for a new product*
- When audience participation is desired. *e.g. the presentation of building development plans for a city*
- When abstract or ‘remote’ ideas are to be communicated. *e.g. a presentation at a science congress or academic conference*

“If you want to give a man credit, put it in writing. If you want to give him hell, do it on the phone”. – a regional manager of a company

○ Check Your Progress 1

1. Two cars are going in the opposite direction in a narrow lane. One of the car drivers blinks his lights to ask the other driver to wait. This is _____ way communication.
2. What are the constituents of verbal communication?
.....
.....
3. Sometimes, teachers give handouts in addition to teaching a class. Why do you think this is done?
.....
.....
4. A person gets a prestigious appointment in a reputed company. His friend’s secretary sends a letter conveying her boss’ congratulations, as the boss is very busy. Do you think this is proper? Justify your answer.
.....
.....
5. Grammaticality and precision are not insisted upon in _____ communication.

5.4 NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

All communication that conveys a message need not be verbal. We can convey our feelings through a smile, a frown, or silence. Non-verbal communication is communication that is not conveyed through words. Albert Mehrabian, a professor of psychology, estimates that 55% of the impact of a message is through the non-verbal mode. Non-verbal communication may be visual or auditory.

Symbols, signs, sounds, eye contact and facial expression, body postures, gestures, and physical appearance – all these constitute non-verbal communication. Silence too falls under this category. In olden days, when communication media were not well-developed, drums and fire were used as a mode of communication. People would communicate through a relay in the beating of drums. There were different lengths and notes of the drumbeat for different purposes.

Symbols and signs are used where one-way communication is adequate and effective. For example, it is enough to give a picture of a petrol pump or a telephone on a sign post for a driver on a highway to know what is available nearby. Similarly a school bell gives information to the children to assemble or disperse. The language barrier can easily be overcome with non-verbal signs, which is why signs are used instead of words like Exit, Stairs, or Toilet at all major national or international public places such as airports, railway stations or tourist centres.

Do you know these common signs? 

1 st row	 1	 2	 3	 4	 5	 6	 7	 8
2 nd row	 9	 10	 11	 12	 13	 14	 15	 16
3 rd row	 17	 18	 19	 20	 21	 22	 23	 24
4 th row	 25	 26	 27	 28	 29	 30	 31	 32
5 th row	 33	 34	 35	 36	 37	 38	 39	 40

This is a chart of symbols used in transportation. You may not have seen all of them, but you may still be able to make a good guess at what they convey. The key to these symbols is given in “Check Your Progress” given at the end of the Unit.

Similarly communication can be made with gestures. A cricket umpire makes gestures to the scorer and players about the runs, their nature and also to declare them out. A foot-ball referee warns the players about a foul through colour cards.

Judicious selection of the right mode of communication for a purpose is the crux of effective communication. In business communication, the non-verbal mode includes using audio-visual aids or media that supplement or support oral or written communication, especially during formal presentations. Thus non-verbal communication is very important and complements verbal communication.

Certain signals work very well as they are fixed and commonly understood. Traffic lights and road signs are easily understood by every one. Election symbols are easy to pick out on a ballot paper especially when the number of candidates is large – it is easier to look for a symbol than read a big list of names of candidates – or the electorate is not entirely literate, or literate in a variety of scripts. These are popular modes of communication when the message is of a limited nature. It is only when the communication becomes more complex and varied that we need language, and non-verbal communication relegates itself to a complementary, if not secondary, role.

Studies suggest that about 45% of our communication is supplemented through the non-verbal mode. It acts as a stimulus to effective communication. Verbal and non-verbal communication are supportive and complementary.

5.4.1 Advantages of Non-verbal Communication

Visual communication is very advantageous when quick communication has to be made to a large group, or a person has to understand a short, simple message in a fleeting moment.

5.4.1.1 Signs

Consider the role of signals. Anybody who sees a red light automatically stops the vehicle without conscious thought, almost reflexively. The danger sign of a skull with two crossbones instantaneously communicates a warning. The waving of a green or red flag by a railway guard or a station master passes on a clear message to the driver and to the people on the platform. A flare from a boat is easy to pick up for a rescuing plane.

5.4.1.2 Symbols

Some symbols are universal and easy to understand. They are popular and convey the same message in almost all cultures. A heart signifies love. A dove with a twig in its beak, or a white flag, indicates peace or surrender.

Logos are strikingly effective. In India, the moment one sees the insignia of three lions and the Ashok Chakra, one understands that the communication is from the government. Private companies spend time, money and effort developing logos that symbolize them and are memorable and meaningful. If you surf the Internet, you will find sites that challenge you to identify some common and not-so-commonly known logos. Logos are recognized by children before they begin to read, as

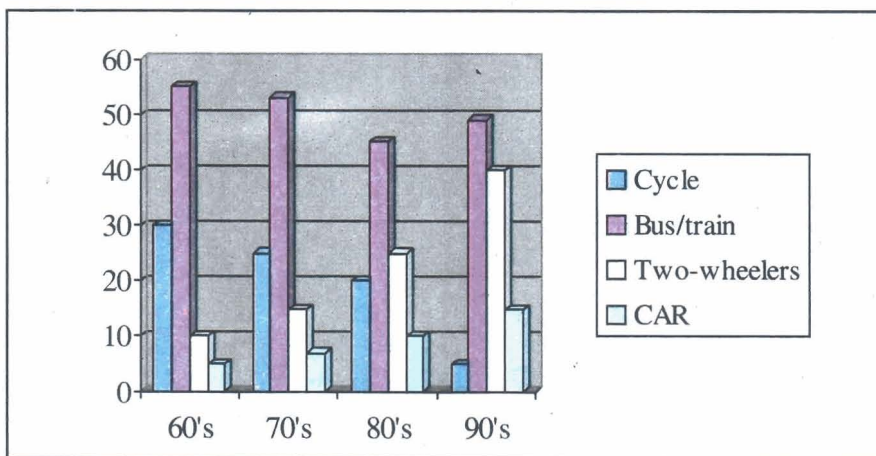
advertisers know; and logos are also widely copied, sometimes with minimal changes, to trap the unwary and often illiterate consumer.

The science of semiotics has much to say about how much care and thought goes into the development of logos. Take a look at the Hutch logo (the popular service provider for cell phones). It consists of three pink triangular shapes. If you look more closely, you will notice that the white space in the middle mimics the shape of the three triangles that enclose it! This idea comes from a basic idea of design, that the spaces that are left unspecified are as important as those that are specified – thus “the cup is not only the curved shape, but also the emptiness that it holds”, as one philosopher puts it.

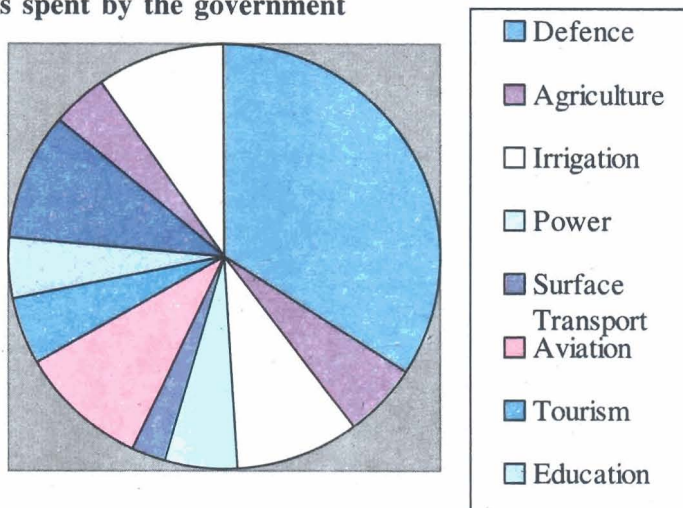
5.4.1.3 Graphs, Charts and Flow Charts

Graphs, charts, and flow charts are effective means of communication, and we shall say more about them in a later block on writing. Here let us consider a couple of quick examples. The details of the mode of transport preferred by office goers can be better represented as a graph than as a verbal description. Similarly the split up of expenditure of a country can be effectively shown through a pie-diagram. The organizational set up of a university can easily be shown through a flow-chart. The first two examples are illustrated below:

Mode of Transport used by office goers in Hyderabad



How the money is spent by the government



5.4.2 Limitations of Non-verbal Communication

Colourful charts and hoardings are no doubt very attractive, but they are expensive

and take time to produce and install. Where the purpose is limited and costs are to be cut, this mode is not appropriate. Huge and attractive hoardings can divert the attention of vehicle drivers and cause accidents or traffic jams. There have also been instances of improperly erected hoardings being blown down in a storm, injuring or even killing people.

The strength of non-verbal communication is also its limitation. Its strength is that it cuts across language and literacy barriers, as we have seen. Its limitation is that not all gestures and symbols are universal. Where a given gesture or symbol can be interpreted in more than one way, it gives rise to ambiguity and miscommunication.

5.5 BODY LANGUAGE AND SILENCE

Facial expression is a fundamental contributor to effective communication, and sometimes referred to as the “visible code”. “We talk with our vocal chords, but we communicate with our facial expressions, our tone of voice, our whole body”, says a psychologist. During a television interview, a mayor denies any knowledge of a bribe paid by a visiting delegation – but the camera focuses on his hands, which are making nervous and tense gestures. “When people don't know whether to believe what they're hearing or what they're seeing, they go with the body language – it tells them the truth”, says a management consultant. “You can play fast and loose with words, but it's much more difficult to do that with gestures”.

The scientific study of body language is called kinesics.

5.5.1 Eye Contact

Eye contact is one of the most important factors in effective communication. When we want someone's attention, we say that we're trying to “catch their eye”. Conversely, we know that a person who doesn't look at us is trying to avoid us.

The eyes have been called the windows of the soul; they seem to reflect our nature. A speaker should always look at the listeners. He should not, because of his own nervousness, look down or look up, or gaze out through the windows while he is speaking. This will give the listeners an impression to the listeners that the speaker is not interested in what (s)he is saying.

When speaking to a group, look at all the listeners; avoid focussing on any part of the group, or on an individual. Some nervous speakers make this mistake, if some person or persons seem to keenly following their talk. It is for the speaker to bring everybody into the talk and make them focus on him or her. You may remember from your school or college days a feeling that some teacher always looked at some particular boys or girls.

Remember that looking at someone to establish eye contact is different from staring at them (which is offensive) or looking into their eyes (which is reserved for lovers!). At an interview, for example, if the interviewee looks right back at the interviewer throughout the time a question is asked and answered, the interviewee may be thought to be aggressive, cheeky or disrespectful. In such situation the acceptable direction of the gaze is towards the interlocutor's face, without fixating on any particular feature; and the gaze is occasionally broken by looking away.

Here is a table of some actions and their common interpretations.

Action	Interpretation
<i>Eyes, face:</i>	
Maintaining eye contact	Keenness to talk, boldness, confidence
Looking away, shifting eye-contact	Disagreement, impatience, loss of interest, dishonesty
Looking down	Shyness, nervousness
Looking up over the interlocutor's head	Lack of interest
Closing the eyes	Lack of interest, hostility
Raising the eyebrows	Surprise
Widening of eyes	Surprise, threat, or shock
Irregular movement of the eyeballs	Confusion
<i>Lips:</i>	
Tight lips	Anger or low spirits
Biting the lips	Nervousness
<i>Body language and posture</i>	
A jutting-out chin	Defiance, belligerence
Rubbing one eye	Boredom
Open palms	Openness
Foot tapping	Impatience
Folded hands resting on table	Attention
Leaning slightly forward, seated	Showing interest
Leaning back, seated	Relaxed

A uniform is a code; it tells the people around a person what his or her profession is. This is how we identify a policeman, a fire-fighter or a hotel employee. We instinctively turn to a person in uniform when there is trouble in a public place.

Some professions do not have a uniform, but dress is important for them as they deal with the public. Medical representatives and sales persons, for example, are always formally dressed in a shirt and tie. Academics and intellectuals may, on the other hand, make it a point to show their independence from public opinion by dressing very differently – in a national dress, for example, such as a dhoti and chappals.

The episode of the famous painter M.F. Hussein being denied entry into an exclusive club because of his insistence on going barefoot is part of our recent history. Earlier, Gandhiji gave up his western lawyer's dress for the loincloth, the dress of the poorest person in India, thereby making a powerful political statement. His famous remark – after he had had tea at Buckingham palace with King George of Britain, dressed in his usual dhoti, slippers and upper cloth – that the King “had on enough clothes for both of them”, was in reply to the question of an inquisitive and sarcastic journalist who asked if he had been dressed appropriately for a meeting with the King.

Dress is important for a speaker. A shabbily dressed speaker can hardly command the respect or attention of the audience. Proper dress gives the audience a feeling

that you care for them, that you respect them. This is the reason people prefer a tie, a plain shirt and polished shoes for formal-occasions.

5.5.3 Posture

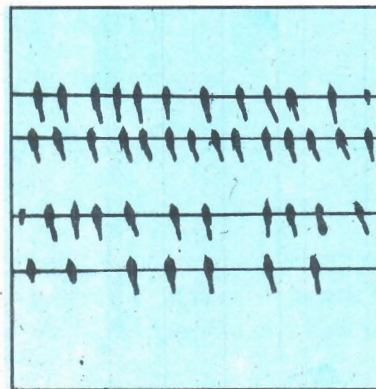
Proper posture is also important for good communication. Leaning backwards, swinging the legs, resting the head backwards in reclining chair or swivelling too frequently or playfully – are all bad manners. Bend forward a little, keeping the elbows at the side of the trunk of your body, to indicate that you are listening attentively.

5.5.4 Distance

The physical distance between people is usually a clear indication of the relationship between them. The idiom 'to keep someone at arm's length' clearly tells us that the more the distance, the weaker the relationship. The study of the human use of space within the context of culture is called proxemics, and is associated with the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Hall defined three kinds of personal spaces that surround individuals:

- Intimate space--the closest "bubble" of space surrounding a person. Entry into this space is acceptable only for the closest friends and intimates.
- Social and consultative spaces-- the spaces in which people feel comfortable conducting routine social interactions with acquaintances as well as strangers.
- Public space-- the area of space beyond which people will perceive interactions as impersonal and relatively anonymous.

Cultural expectations widely. "In the United States, for instance, conversation will be of roughly 4-7', but in many parts of Europe the expected social distance is roughly half that with the result that Americans travelling overseas often experience the urgent need to back away from a conversation partner who seems to be getting too close", says a commentator.



about these spaces vary widely. "In the United States, for instance, conversation will be of roughly 4-7', but in many parts of Europe the expected social distance is roughly half that with the result that Americans travelling overseas often experience the urgent need to back away from a conversation partner who seems to be getting too close", says a commentator.

Physical distance plays a large role in communication, and is normally achieved very intuitively. Gender sensitivity, cultural practices, and individual preferences all govern our ideas about how much personal space around us we are comfortable with. Hall used photographs to show how strangers intuitively maintained a distance between them. In one pair of photographs, Hall showed the spatial parallelism between a set of birds seated on a wire and a set of people seated at a bus stop, waiting for a bus!

In some cultures, a pat from a superior may give an employee a feeling of confidence and satisfaction that his work is being recognized or appreciated. Similarly, a warm hug or hearty shake hand may let the worker know that the boss is open and sincere and wants a good relationship. A lecturer standing on an elevated platform can rarely strike up a rapport with his students. One who goes closer to the students, walking in between the aisles, may strike the right chord of intimacy. But too much closeness between a superior and his staff may be seen as intimidating.

Some people use the wrong body language when they are emotional or wish to express something forcefully. A raised hand and a pointing finger can always be

construed as a threat. The author has personally observed such a gesture being made by an emotional advocate in the High Court. Naturally, the judge felt that he was being intimidated and admonished the lawyer. The client had to suffer for his lawyer's unintentional lapse.

5.5.5 Silence: Its Role in Communication

Silence is a powerful if intriguing medium of communication. It has a dramatic impact. It has a determinant effect – it is power.

Silence can be interpreted in more than one way. Sensitivity is a pre-requisite for the effective use of silence as a communication tool. It could be effectively used to express one's protest. It can also provoke introspection in speakers as well as listeners.

Silence can have a dramatic effect in presentations or speeches to draw the attention of everyone – those who are chatting quietly, or even napping. However, if it is not used appropriately, it is open to misconstrual as lack of preparation on the part of the speaker.

Silence can be appropriate or inappropriate depending upon the situation. It can be a very good tool in negotiations. When unrealistic demands are made by a party or workers' unions, a stoic silence can make the other party scale down their rates or demands. When someone is emotional, it is desirable to maintain silence until s/he lets out all the steam. It is easier to handle a person whose anger has cooled down.

Indira Gandhi is said to be famous for her silences at high-level meetings. The Japanese are also said to use silence very effectively.

✓ Check Your Progress 2

6. What is non-verbal communication? (*in one sentence*)

.....

7. _____ can be used as an effective tool in negotiations.

8. "The _____ are the windows to the soul". Do you agree with this? Discuss.

.....

.....

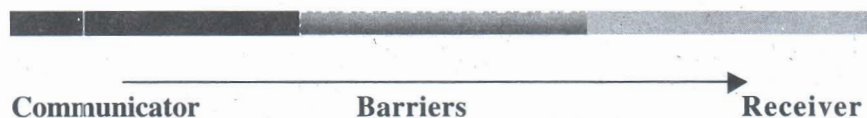
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5.6 BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

Everybody tries to communicate, but not communication is successful. That is, there may be a difference between what is intended as the message and what is understood.



The reasons for these barriers to communication are several, and may be classified under three broad categories:

- (a) Semantic and Linguistic barriers
- (b) Socio-Psychological barriers
- (c) Cross-Cultural barriers.

We have already discussed some aspects of cross-cultural communication in this unit and in the previous one. We have seen that barriers in cross-cultural communication may arise from variation among cultures in the meanings attached to gestures, symbols or body language. We shall now speak about the first two categories of barriers to communication.

5.6.1 Semantic and Linguistic Barriers

Language is not a precise tool for thought. It needs to be handled deftly, accurately and carefully. (We shall return to this point in later blocks.)

5.6.1.1 Ambiguity in Expression

Every language has words that sound the same but have different meanings, or words that sound or look very similar but are very different in meaning. Ambiguity can arise because of such words or expressions, whether intentionally or unintentionally. An intentional use of such a word is commonly known as a pun.

Look at this example: *They can fish here.*

This can mean either (i) they are permitted to fish here, or
(ii) they put fish into cans here (for marketing).

The word 'can' in (i) is a "modal auxiliary"; in (ii) it is a "main verb" related in meaning to the noun (a) can. There is a well-known joke about the farmer, who said about his abundant harvest of tomatoes: "We eat or sell what we can; and what we can't, we can". By now you can easily understand how the farmer is using the word can in two meanings! Ambiguity can arise out of the careless use of pronouns, as the following riddle illustrates:

A carpenter was instructing his overworked and underpaid helper. "I'll hold the nail in place. When I nod my head, hit it hard with the hammer". What did the helper hit?

The suggestion is that the disgruntled helper hit the carpenter hard on the head (instead of the nail), "because he asked him to"!

5.6.1.2 Homophones

Words that are pronounced similarly but have different meanings are called homophones. Here are some examples.

sea, see; cite, site, sight; eye, I; wait, weight; check, cheque; weak, week; loose, lose.

A proficient listener can easily make out the meaning from the context but a not-so-proficient or inattentive listener may have problems when (s)he listens to sentences like these:

It's a knotty problem.
It's a naughty problem.

Therefore, one should be careful in using such words, keeping the listener in view.

5.6.1.3 Contextual Meaning and Speech Acts

Language as used in communication has the property that much of the meaning is derived from the intention and the context of an utterance. Language is used to perform a "speech act" such as giving an order, extending an invitation, and so on. Thus the sentence, "Ram, the door is open" can be interpreted in at least 5 ways, depending on the context:

as an invitation: *Ram, come in.*

as a command: *Ram, close the door.*

as a warning: *Ram, be careful!*

as a statement of intent: *Ram, we are open for discussions.*

as a dismissal: *Ram, you can leave.*

as an exclamation of surprise: *My god! Someone has broken into the house.*

as a warning: *Ram, don't do any mischievous things (lest someone should see you).*

5.6.1.4 Accent and Intonation

Accent – on a particular syllable in a word, or on a word in a sentence – can change the meaning drastically. In sentences,

They **stole** the fruit from the garden.

They stole **the fruit** from the garden.

They stole the fruit from **the garden**.

They stole the fruit from the garden.

The effective use of intonation – the "tune" in which something is said – can convey a meaning that is not actually said. If you hear the words "He's quite good" with a rising tone on good, commonly called "comma intonation", you get the impression that the speaker has left something unsaid: "He's quite good, but ...". What is left unsaid is usually taken to be a negative comment!

5.6.1.5 Word Shift

The meaning of a sentence can change when the position of a word is shifted.

They rang up **the parents concerned**. (i.e. the parents connected with the issue)

They rang up the **concerned parents**. (i.e. the parents who were worried)

It snows here *only* in winter. (at no other time than in winter)

It *only* snows here in winter. (it does nothing but snow during winter)

It snows *only* here in winter. (nowhere else does it snow)

They want the report *only* on bond paper. (no other paper is to be used)

Only they want the report on bond paper. (no one else does)

They want *only* the report on bond paper. (other things need not be on bond paper)

5.6.1.6 Style

Our communication must be made in a style appropriate to the occasion. We shall distinguish mainly two styles: formal and informal. Using a formal style where the informal one is called for may create a comic effect. An informal style where a formal style is expected could be misunderstood as rudeness or lack of etiquette.

A very formal and completely unambiguous style is required in legal statements, which have to be absolute, allowing for no other possible interpretation. For example, an ordinary sentence, "I did not borrow Rs 50,000 from Mr Rao on June 6, 2006" could be made precise as follows: "I did not borrow Rs 50,000 or any other amount from Mr Rao on June 6, 2006 or on any other day". But such statements should be used only in legal parlance. Their everyday use by a speaker puts him or in danger of being labelled an eccentric!

The language of a speaker should vary according to the role he is playing. Look at the following statements, which more or less convey the same meaning of empathy:

- I feel your pain.* – A politician
- I hear what you're saying.* – Call centre staff
- I see what you mean.* – A businessman

5.6.1.7 Register and Jargon– Acronyms

In certain fields certain words have a special meaning. Those not from the field may not know that "register", or the particular meaning of a word in that field. E.g., the word instrument in field of banking is a cheque or a demand draft; a section means a bundle of hundred notes of the same denomination.

Jargon consists of a set of words specific to a department, field or profession. Within its field, jargon does help in keeping communication short, yet effective and even precise. There is medical jargon, legal jargon, sports jargon, trade jargon and political jargon. For people not in the field, jargon may be confusing, irritating or misleading. A stock market derivative has little to do with a mathematical derivation, and the silly mid-on and mid-off positions do not appear silly to the cricket lover!

Acronyms are words made by putting together the initial letters of a descriptive name. They are usually understood only within their context: STD, PAN, PIN, NGO are common acronyms in India. What we call a PIN code is a ZIP code in America. Some acronyms, however, have attained the status of words: the word radar was originally an acronym (Radio Detection And Ranging).

✓ Check Your Progress 3

9. What does the symbol known as the 'swastika' mean in the Indian context? What does it mean in the German context? Are you aware of a move (in the year 2007) to ban the 'swastika' in Europe, and the reaction of Indians in Europe to this proposal?

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10. The saying “Time flies like an arrow” was input to a computer that had been programmed with a dictionary and the rules of English grammar. The computer came up with *six* different interpretations for this sentence!

What is the common interpretation of the sentence – what does it mean?

Can you make a guess at what the other interpretations offered by the computer were?

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11. Identify the barriers to communication in the following anecdotes.

A German exchange student staying with a family in the US was invited to an alcohol-free party. His host family faxed his parents in Germany asking that they send permission for the student to attend. “No” came the quick reply. They did not want their son to attend any party where free alcohol was served.

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A man told the canteen boy to make a coffee for him with “less sugar”. To his surprise he was served a cup of coffee without sugar. When asked, the canteen boy replied haughtily, “You only asked for sugarless coffee!”

5.6.2 Socio-psychological Barriers

5.6.2.1 The Attention-span of the Listener

However interesting a topic, the time spent on it should not exceed the audience’s patience or attention-span. On the telephone, brevity is essential. E-mails should always be brief. Brevity indicates an effort by the speaker to convey the essence of what (s)he wants to say in the best possible way. A classic example of brevity: when Gandhiji died, the writer and Nobel laureate Pearl S. Buck remarked, “Another crucifixion”. In just two words, she conveyed the idea of Gandhiji as a prophet.

Student A: The last speaker at the seminar was very good.

Student B: Was he? What did he speak about?

Student A: Oh, about two minutes!

At an inaugural function, speaker after speaker had held forth, ignoring the audience’s growing impatience and restlessness. Finally the master of ceremonies announced: “And now our Chief Guest will deliver his address”. The chief guest – a reputed speaker – got up. “Ladies and Gentlemen”, he said, “my address is 3, Park Avenue, Regency Road, Chennai”. He sat down to a thunderous ovation.

5.6.2.2 Laughter, the Best Medicine!

Whether in teaching or talking, a smile always complements the message. Even a difficult concept can be conveyed through humour. Occasional jokes and anecdotes embellish the talk. Eye-contact and a smile give the listeners a feeling of togetherness.

When some people are clearly getting impatient, an appropriate joke changes the mood of the group immediately. Here is an example. A member of an audience looked at his watch during a speech. The speaker quipped: "I don't mind if someone looks at their watch. But I do get offended if they hold it to their ear to see if it has stopped!"

5.6.2.3 External Disturbances and the Wrong Medium

Noise from the surroundings or mechanical failures can sabotage communication. A school used to hold an annual drama week in its open courtyard in the evening. Music blaring from a local place of worship forced the rescheduling of the performances to the morning! People who use computerized presentations need to have a back-up plan in case their equipment is mismatched with the host's facilities, or in case there is no assured power supply during their presentation.

Each mode or medium of communication has its characteristic strengths and weaknesses. A talk filled with statistics is eminently forgettable if it is not supplemented with visuals such as the pie-diagrams and bar-graphs discussed above. Think of our irritation when cricket scores are given verbally in the television commentary rather than being flashed on the screen!

5.6.2.4 Personal Bias and Strong Feelings

People who have strong feelings about certain issues or people may be ineffective listeners or readers. Their emotion will bias or cloud the message. Similarly, a speaker who has very strong convictions may tend to speak in absolute terms, or in a didactic tone.

5.6.2.5 Selectivity, or the 'I see Only What I want to See' Attitude

This attitude is very dangerous, because the resulting miscommunication can remain undetected. The speaker may have spoken well, and the listener may even confirm that (s)he has understood something very clearly. But what has been understood may be quite different from what was meant to be understood. The following anecdote illustrates this.

A priest wanted to demonstrate to his congregation the harmful effects of alcohol. He half-filled a glass with alcohol and dropped an insect into it, which struggled and died. The beaming priest asked a person in the gathering, "So, what can you infer from this?"

The man rose to his feet and replied, "If we take alcohol occasionally, the worms in the belly will die!"

5.6.2.6 Cynicism and Negativity

The cynical and negative person is not open to new ideas.



Counsellor: To gain self-confidence, you must avoid using negative words such as can't and not. Do you think you could do that?

Young man: Well, I can't see why not!

5.6.2.7 Perceived Benefits

For good two-way communication, we need an attentive and interested audience. It is necessary for the communicator to ensure that the topic of the talk is of some

relevance to the audience. If they do not perceive any benefit to them, the listener(s) may soon lose interest.

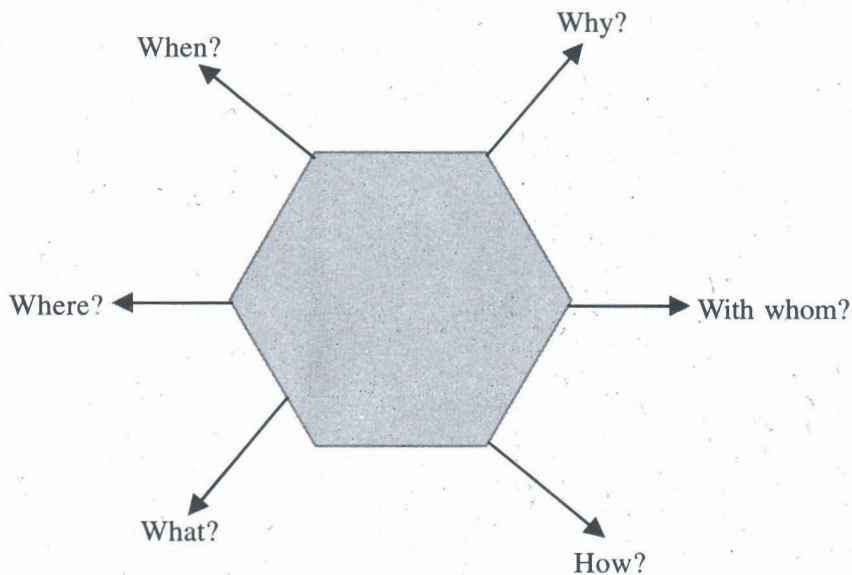
5.6.3 Cross Cultural Barriers

We have discussed in the previous unit 4.1.1.8 about several cross cultural communication problems that people experience, especially the Indians. Being able to speak correct English with a 'correct' or 'proper' accent is no longer adequate. The ability to understand different accents, idioms ever expanding jargons and expressions – all these cultural differences make up the skills that have to be acquired.

One should also be aware of the culture of the others, especially when they are our guests or when we are in their country. These can be a variety of matters. Behaviours such as seeing people ignoring red traffic lights, spitting on the floor, smoking in public or queuing for a bus. All depending on one's own culture, may appear as weird, strange, rude, ignorant or simply silly. For example, why do the English queue for everything? This relates to their approach to fairness, justice, order the rights. The rationale behind the queue is that those that get there first should be right be served first or get on the bus first. Many other cultures simply do not queue in this manner as it is not part of their cultural programming. Greeting people, shakinghands, offering food, expressing gratitude, eye contact, body language, colour codes are some of the areas one has to observe and gain 'cultural knowledge'. Such sensivity towards other cultures helps us to communicate across cultures effectively. Awareness of other cultures does not mean losing identity of one's own culture. One can maintain his cultural identity and yet be a successful communicator across cultures.

5.7 THE SIX WH-S THAT SEE YOU THROUGH AS A COMMUNICATOR

In a profession or may be even in life, six **Wh-s** hold the golden key to successful communication. These are complementary to each other and not mutually exclusive.



Before speaking we should ask ourselves the following questions

1. Why am I communicating?
2. Where am I communicating?

3. When am I communicating?
4. How should I communicate?
5. What am I communicating?
6. With whom am I communicating?

These questions are important because when the place changes our status too changes. We may not be treated the same way as we are treated in our place. Even a good thing said at a wrong time may not attract the other's attention, because the time is inconvenient to them or unsuitable to them. If the communication is purposeless or not required by the others, we may not interest them.

5.8 LET US SUM UP

- Communication can be classified into Verbal and Non-verbal communication.
- Verbal communication involves oral and written modes.
- Non-verbal communication does not use words.
- One way and two way communication are types of communication. In one way communication no response is expected. Two way communication works both ways. It is effective.
- We may use the oral mode or the written mode of verbal communication. On some occasions we have to use both the modes.
- Non-verbal communication cuts across language barriers. It is sometimes very quick to communicate. But it has the danger of not being understood or even being misunderstood due to variations in cultures.
- Symbols, visuals, dress code, postures, silence, eye contact, space distancing, body language – are some of the contributors for non verbal communication.
- Silence is also a kind of communication. It can be used effectivelyh sometimes. It has an impact. It can be used to express dissent and also to create interest in the listences. It is a very important took in negotiations.
- In spite of language proficiency, communication fails or at least is not effective. The factors that act as barriers can be classified (a) linguistic semantic barriers (b) socio psychological barriers and (c) cross cultural communication.
- Some of the linguistic semantic barriers are: ambiguity, accent, pitch, use of acronyms, careless word shift, wrong intonation, use of jargon, idioms.
- Some of the socio psychological barriers are: choice of wrong medium, lack of humour, time constraint, inhibitions, no perceived benefit to the audience, absence of body language or wrong use of body language.
- Cross cultural barriers include: inability to understand signals in other cultures, attaching meanings as per one's own culture, not developing sensivity to other cultures, space distancing, selectivity or "I see what I want to see" attitude.

- To be a good communicator, one should remember the six Whs – With whom? Where? When? How? Why?

5.9 FURTHER READING

Babu Rao, GSRK 2002. *Business Communication and Report Writing* : Himalaya Publishers.

Hall, Edward 1959, *The Silent Language*: Greenwich.

Krishna Mohan & Meera Banerji 1990 *Developing Communication Skills*: Macmillan.

Monippally, M.M. 1996 *Effective Communication Skills*: Tata McGraw Hill.

Pinker, Steven 1994. *The Language Instinct*: Penguin Books.

5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. One way communication
2. Oral and written modes.
3. They want their students to “carry home” ideas for optimal understanding.
4. Congratulatory remarks are conveyed to show personal warmth. It is better not to do anything rather than asking the secretary to do the job. It amounts to an insult.
5. Oral
6. A way of communication without using words.
7. Silence
8. Eyes.
9. The Swastika is a religious or auspicious symbol in India. In Germany it is associated with Hitler and Nazism. There was a furore when a young British prince wore a uniform with the symbol to a fancy dress party, and the Europeans wanted to ban the symbol. But for the Indians in Europe, this was quite unacceptable, as the symbol conveys good things to them.
10. The intended interpretation of this saying is that time goes by very quickly. The computer came up with the following additional interpretations:
 - a. Time goes on as quickly as an arrow goes. (intended interpretation)
 - b. Measure the speed of flies just as you measure the speed of an arrow.
 - c. Measure the speed of flies just as an arrow measures the speed of files.
 - d. There are flies that are like an arrow; measure their speed.
 - e. A particular kind of fly, called timeflies, like arrows.
11. “Alcohol-free” was confused with “free-alcohol” because the German speakers of English shifted the words around.

The canteen boy too did not make a distinction between “less sugar” and “sugarless”. He knew only one way of interpreting it.

Key to Do you know these common signs?

- 1st row:** (1) telephone (2) airport ahead (3) post office (4) first aid
(5) baggage lockers (6) coats check (7) lost and found (8) escalator
- 2nd row:** (9) airport (10) hotel information (11) enquiries (12) waiting room
(13) washrooms – men's & women's (14) elevator (15) stairs (16) heliped
- 3th row:** (17) restaurant (18) car rental (19) ship docks or port (20) metro
railway (21) taxi stand & bus stand (22) bus-stand (23) taxi (24) cafeteria
- 4th row:** (25) luggage room (26) enquiry (27) women's hairdresser (28) men's
hairdresser (29) hairdresser (30) shops (31) pub or bar (32)
- 5th row:** (33) litter bin (34) no pets (35) no smoking (36) smoking allowed
(37) One way entry (38) no entry (39) no parking (40) fire extinguisher

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