

# PARALANGUAGE AND META COMMUNICATION: EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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## Abstract

*In the 21st century the myth around communication skills as an inborn quality has been broken. It is also high time that the education sector in India should become more student centric and produce an intelligent, innovative and independent workforce that can create a niche at the global level and express themselves effectively. NEP 2020 also emphasizes the need to develop globally confident workforce rather than passive graduate and post graduate degree holders. Effective communication skills is now an integral part of one's overall success in different disciplines. It was earlier believed that those who are good communicators had an intrinsic acumen for public speaking and this is an area that can't be developed but now it is not so. Good schools these days give more practice to even 3yrs old children in play-way schools. They present their rhymes while facing their class right from the beginning. So communication skills will be internalized right from the beginning. While, otherwise so far in the education sector the student use to sit in the classroom as a passive learner and became a tool of receiving information from first period of the time table till the ninth period. The present day education system requires to embed development of effective communication skills. Deliberate and constant efforts along with regular practice will ensure improvement of this skill. Besides, good knowledge of importance of verbal and non-verbal messages, signals, symbols help in cultivating better relationships with peer group, colleagues, family, relatives, customers and business partners. At the global level also we witness how S. Jaishankar gives prompt reply to scathing attacks of international journalists. Power of persuasion, power of negotiation, power of conflict resolution, body language, couple communication, group communication, interpreting others body language, public speaking, conversation with elders, with children etc requires good training right from the beginning. The present paper focuses on the relevance of paralanguage and communication skills in education sector.*

**Keywords:** Paralanguage, Proxemics, Kinesics, Meta-Communication

## INTRODUCTION

Earlier the domain of communication skills was neglected by educational institutions and hence the students became good readers, they felt they were loaded with knowledge but they felt tongue tied when they had to face interviews. In the school and college curriculum it was seen that some training was imparted in the form of debates, declamation, seminars etc but it was often seen that only a miniscule percentage of students could participate in these events and usually teachers promote those miniscule percentage of students so that they can win trophies for the college as a result rest of the student felt left out. They carried the notion that they will always be lagging behind. Hence, it is high time that the educational institutions need to arm the future generation with effective communication skills. Is it important for students only, no, it is equally important for teachers as well. As Pramuja Baydillah puts it, "Communication is paramount in education. Whether it is teacher to student, student to student, teacher to teacher, teacher to parent, teacher to admin or admin to parent, or vice versa, communication is needed to make sure our students are successful. Communication is when information is passed from a sender to a recipient using a medium. There are different media that can be used: Visual communication (using body language or gestures) Communicating with sounds (like human language, but may also be the barking of a dog) Communication using touch. ("https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354968194\_Importance\_Of\_Communication\_In\_Education) elements are taking into account" (David Abercrombie, Elements of General Phonetics)

It is quite important that higher education teachers should become mindful of the poor elements of use of paralanguage in classroom teaching. In common, "there are five errors, related to paralanguage, which are demonstrated by teachers; these are: poor personal habits, continually stiff, blocking or touching face, exaggerated hand gestures, and tapping or shaking legs and hands (Kroehert, 2006)." Paralanguage involves vocalic that may reveal the hidden meaning behind the conveyed message. It involves the tone, tenor, pitch, pattern of rise and fall in speech and the rhythm in which the person speaks. Paralanguage is occurs due to over conscious or unconscious state of mind of a person at the time of communication. Now the question arises why give importance to Para-linguistics? or to meta communication? How and when did it start? It is very important to know this area because if India has to become a successful economy and a world leader then it's important to

understand the dynamics that is ultimately going to help it. Nothing can be created in isolation. It is only by utilizing the large workforce; the youth; the right training of the youth in academics as well as in skills, including communication skills that is going to yield the required results. If we observe the journey of recent superpower the USA we find that it had invested a lot of money in harnessing the talent of well trained youth, scientists, engineers across the world. It invested a lot of money in research and innovation in the 1950's. The studies in developing communication skills is also one of the major areas.

The Department of US State financed the studies in communication and the Foreign Service Institute was the leading department in this field. George L Trager, Charles Hockett, Henry Smith and Ray Birdwhistell were the main scientists who worked on different aspects of para linguistics. Henry and Charles worked on Descriptive Linguistics while Edward Hall developed studies in Proxemics, and Ray explored Kinesics. John Gumpres highlighted the importance of Society and its Language.

During communication, the paralanguage elements like the expressive aspect of voice, loudness, pitch, rate and tone covers the attitudinal quality of the communicator. The adjustment of emotive value of a message impacts the message a lot. Lexical ambiguity can be removed by speech like if somebody says, "shut up," in an angry voice then it will convey a different meaning while if the same thing is said in a jovial tone, "oh, shut up," it will convey a casual and friendly meaning. Similarly cultural differences also play a significant role in giving meaning or meaninglessness to a conversation. Cross-cultural differences can lead to thematic understanding of a message. The setting off of certain words in an utterance, the empirical issues, perception of the message is equally important in a conversation.

A simple utterance like "Huh," has been studied critically by Mark Dingemanse, Francisco Torreira and N. J. Enfield in their research work, "Is Huh? a Universal Word? Conversational Infrastructure and the Convergent Evolution of Linguistic Items? They have investigated it in conversations in ten different languages. They found out that form and function of this universal interjection. They claim that, "languages are much greater than expected by chance." Their study also support the claim that "it is a lexical, conventionalized form that has to be learnt, unlike grunts or emotional cries," besides, "possible reasons for the cross-linguistic similarity and propose an account in terms of convergent evolution. *Huh?* is a universal word not because it is innate but because it is shaped by selective pressures in an interactional environment that all languages share: that of other-initiated repair." Their study is based on the evolutionary models of language change and that conversational infrastructure can drive the convergent cultural evolution of linguistic items." Since meaning and the words are arbitrary in nature. There is no connection of the word and meaning, the meaning is given by us. A mike is called as mike because all of us decided to call it a mike not knife otherwise if tomorrow we decide we can alter the words. Similarly gasping or taking a heavy breath during conversation is also an event for researchers. Para-linguists study it under the context of emotional expression of shock, disgust, tiredness or surprise. It is often accompanied by emotional reaction to an event that may be pleasant or unpleasant.

## DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN STUDENTS

Communication is prompt and natural but for professional development communication should be made an integral part of the curriculum. Practice in good communication should be embedded in day to day study course. Presentations, group discussions and oral communication should be foci of teaching fraternity henceforth. Verbal and written communication forms the building blocks of communication skills. Interesting activities should be included to improve body language, gestures, hand movements and other para-linguistic aspects for overall effective communication. Regular classroom practice, peer feedback and teacher's feedback encourages the student in facing the public outside the four walls of the classroom. It breaks the inhibition and new confident individual emerges. Regular exposure to public communication like debates, seminars, symposiums and ppt presentations help in overcoming fear, controlling aggression and a balanced presentation. The ability to choose the right words intelligently and a balanced approach while expressing in public also develops during this process.

Just being a good speaker is not enough. Good speaking begins with good listening. Listening requires patience, assimilation and unbiased analyses. It broadens ones horizon and as the time goes by one becomes sharp, focused and multi-dimensional in ones approach towards the nuances of problems. It also helps in dousing aggression among the youngsters as they understand how to put their words politely, assertively but not aggressively. With practice they become clever enough in choosing the right words while conveying their thoughts thus without creating any controversy. That is what is required to become a good public speaker, a diplomat or a public leader otherwise we are living in such times that one wrong tweet by a public figure and the career is finished.

They learn to avoid aggression in the worst of circumstances. They learn to maintain good eye contact & a better body posture while speaking with confidence. Accepting others point of view also comes as a package while practicing communication skills. Besides the best thing one develops is confidence. Which is largely missing in the rote memory pattern and passively listening to teachers throughout 12 +3=2years of one's formal education. Respecting others while acknowledging them, is an important aspect of Communication. Angela Doyen suggests through her research studies on students in Armenian Public Schools that, "Communication techniques do have

a heavy influence on student enthusiasm and communication is one of the factors that affects the outcome of knowledge and information." (Doyen)

The classroom activities should be designed in such a manner that they learn good listening, speaking, reading and writing. Besides formal and informal communication. It requires lot of resourcefulness on the part of the teacher. Like in listening not only one learns to be a good listener but also being respectful to others. Being respectful is just like paying attention to what other is saying, their point of views and opinions, by this, the other one feels greatly appreciated, which leads to a better, honest as well as effective communication. It is also good for developing a democratic attitude. It is well said that 'to be a good communicator, it's essential to be a good listener first'. It's good to listen with whole heart & Communication. The core courses need to be designed to fulfill active listening skills. Focus, attention and acceptance to what other people have to say need to be embedded in the core courses. As one becomes expert in these areas one can remove obscurities by re-framing others questions for better understanding. Learning to politely disagree with others is also an art. Children need to be taught that when they disagree with someone else point of view, it is necessary to sympathize with their point of view instead of simply getting their message across them in some conditions.

#### Speaking Less

Sometimes speaking less is also beneficial. Again this is an art that can be cultivated with the right practice and grooming. Expanding one sentence into a long speech and telling everything in brief, in few seconds like in extempore is also an important art that helps in building a strong foundation of success. The ability to convey your message in a few words as possible and getting straightaway to the point without speaking excessively helps in saving time and energy. The knowledge of when to avoid using filler words while getting straight to the main point helps in engaging audience in bigger platforms.

### IS COMMUNICATION LIMITED TO ONLY SPEAKING OR WRITING?

No, it has innumerable benefits. Good communication skills build strong friendships. It also helps in making the students confident enough to face the people around them. Thus students get interested in going to school every day. It's really important to remain friendly with others in this competitive world. Better verbal Communication and physical expressions help them to make new friends. Studying with good friends in school reduces stress & enables you to learn much better. In later stages, they develop good relations with their customers, clients, business partners, colleagues, bosses etc.

### WHY TEACH PARALANGUAGE AND META COMMUNICATION TO STUDENTS?

Paralanguage is an important factor in foreign language teaching because for Indian students English language is a foreign language and para-linguistic features are essential in the better understanding of English language. Although it has been declared as official language of India but it's grammatical pattern is different from other Indian languages. An important study by Elsadig and Faddal suggests that, "paralanguage strategies assist in communicating effective meanings. It is recommended that EFL teachers and learners should use paralanguage strategies in their teaching and learning processes to convey meaning effectively."

For the development of paralinguistic features group activities should be encouraged in classrooms. For making assignments also, groups should be formed. It develops the spirit of team work as well as understanding each other effectively. Since we have to discourage any kind of group-ism the teacher should keep on changing the groups and formation of new groups should be encouraged. This will help the students in gelling with others easily and later on in their career they will be able to work well with different types of colleagues. Interaction with variety of personalities helps in developing mature, adjustable and flexible personalities. For group activities, the material can be selected in the form of audios, videos, newspapers, magazines, multi-media etc. The activity should be designed in such a manner that it infuses a healthy feeling of competitive spirit and arouses curiosity among students. They need to remain engaged and enthusiastic during the entire process of learning. Practicing the right skills, interactions, exchange of ideas and the ability to connect in different groups is essential for developing paralinguistic and meta-communication features.

Communication is not just a mechanical process. Practice in allied skills of communication improves a student's presence of mind whenever when a person expresses our views, listens to what others are talking about, understands their point of views & also while communicating what we are talking about. It is obvious that to achieve their dreams in any career they want to pursue later in their lives, students need brain power with a sharp memory to become successful in their endeavors.

As we know that India is rapidly moving towards corporatization of all the industries even education sector is moving towards corporate culture, it is high time that Indian students in college and universities should be prepared for the working environment of these sectors. Language and presentation matters a lot in these sectors. Only conveying the message is not enough in corporate sector, it is equally important that the idea is converted into quick actions to get results. Ultimately the idea needs to be converted into something productive and something concrete and beneficial. Again, if the teachers had given enough practice in classrooms in the form of

different groups then it helps the students to work easily in unknown environments also. It becomes easy for the newly inducted managers to work well with management, bosses, colleagues, team mates and subordinates within the industry or company. Similarly with the people outside the domain of the company like the customers, consumers, dealers, may be parents in PTM's.

## COMMUNICATION AND ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

Practice in communication helps in learning mindful speaking. It develops the attitude of think before you speak. The clever choice of words can do wonders in an important conversation and the wrong use of words may result in disaster. For example trolling on twitter, losing elections due to one wrong statement, getting misunderstood or taking into wrong context. Trump lost elections because of his verbatim. In relationships also wrong choice of words may lead to break ups leading to tension, stress and may be poor mental health. Thus, "thinking before you speak is one of the greatest tips to improve your communication skills. Remember, words once spoken cannot be taken back or erased from memory."(Meyer)

Public speaking should be made an integral part of education system. Every student should be allowed to speak on mike during school & college days. Normally it takes three or four stage performances to remove stage fear. Frequent debates on interesting topics, seminars, symposiums, creative writing competitions, academic writing competitions, group discussions, panel discussions etc should be done on daily basis within the class as well within the school and college. Similarly opportunities of representing one's own school and college should be a regular feature. Exposure to such events builds confidence and an ability to hold the audience. Facing the public right from the beginning removes fear, inhibitions, stage fright etc.

## WHY CONVERSATIONS OFTEN TAKE A WRONG TURN?

It is because of loss of control over emotions. practice in communication also helps in training of emotions. Regulation of emotion leads to balanced approach towards expressing something either in written and oral. Our emotions, our response, our reaction play important role in the way we communicate with others. It is important to manage and regulate ones emotions according to the situation and the audience. The choice of medium of expression also matters a lot. For impactful communication for students, it is necessary to make the right choice of the medium of communication. For example, a communication with a professor or university head will look professional through a formal email and not a text message. The medium of communication varies according to the situation. One should choose the best medium for the type of communication required in a particular situation. Communication skills also help in developing amiable and friendly personality. Bosses, colleagues, friends feel comfortable in approaching such people. Life- long good relations are formed with such personalities.

The key to developing effective communicators lies in giving time for preparation before hand, regular practice and by often watching and learning from other speakers. Engaging and interactive communication never fails. Communication can be effective if you can catch the attention of your audience and engage them. The best way to do this is to have interactive conversations with your audience. This way the audience is always alert. Communication skills are the key to a successful career, be it corporate or business. When you can communicate with others, it means you are understood and the flow of work goes smoothly. Developing good communication skills in students must be a priority and must be inculcated right from a young age. Communication allows our students to move forward, but effective communication can work wonders.

## CONCLUSION

The teaching -learning mechanism needs complete overhauling in the current scenario. If India has to utilize its vast human resource it needs to channelize and develop the requisite skills of its youngsters in schools and colleges and among other skills representing oneself effectively is one the means of getting an edge in the current competitive world. As NEP 2020 also suggests that there should be no hard boundaries between curricular and co-curricular activities because the overall purpose of education is to produce a smart, intelligent and self-reliant useful citizen. Hence it is high time that subject teachers as well as language teachers create an environment within the classroom as well as outside the classroom that a child becomes an active learner. The classroom teaching especially in language classrooms should focus on developing the essential features of paralanguage, meta communication and overall impeccable communication skills.

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