

## Conversation Analysis of Muhammad (PBUH) for exploring his Effective Use of Nonverbal Communication including Paralinguistic Features

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### ABSTRACT:

This paper examined the proficiency of Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in nonverbal communication and particularly its sub-fields like Kinesics, Haptics, and Proxemics during conversation in the light of the Hadiths. The Holy Quran attests it and every Muslim believes it that Muhammad (pbuh) was sent by Allah to serve as a role-model in the sphere of refined and excellent manners. We look up to his conversation manners too and his model of conversation, for holding successful conversation. Communication experts and linguists have come up with new perspectives over the dynamics of conversation, according to which people normally assume that the transmission of meaning to the listener and the creation of impression on the mind of the listener is dependent mostly upon words. But in reality words, instead of working in isolation, work in unison with the nonverbal language. In fact, the share of nonverbal language in conveying meaning is more than the verbal language during an interaction. The Holy Prophet kept his volume and tone low and polite; his eye contact was never irritating; his facial expressions were inviting; his smiles and jolliness were befriending; his body contact was soothing, his manner of speaking made his words understandable and memorable; his use of hands was enlightening; his silence was for lenience, the roughness of his conversation opponent led to increase in his politeness, his address to different participants of the gathering was based on consideration and fairness.

**Significant Terms:** Kinesics, Haptics, Proxemics, Conversation Analysis, Paralanguage, Nonverbal communication, Body language, Politeness, Tone.

### Introduction:

Instead of having lengthy communication and instead of having long direct interaction with the Holy Prophet, the impression sustained by his companions or any other conversation participants in his company was deep-seated and had far-reaching effects upon their behavior and outlook. The reason behind this is that creation of impression and creation of meaning is not done exclusively

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through words. Discourse analysis of the oral traditions of the Holy Prophet about his conversation was carried out with respect to the sub-fields of nonverbal communication like Kinesics, Proxemics, and Haptics. Normally people think that the creation of impression on the mind of the listener and the transmission of meaning to the listener are executed by words alone. Advanced communicative studies guide us that impression is created and meaning is transmitted not exclusively through words but through their combination with different forms of non-verbal components of communication.

Nonverbal communication is very crucial but neglected part of communication. Nonverbal language and paralinguage, instead of words, communicates through facial expressions, posture, gestures, movement, touch, smell, sounds and voice and their role in the creation of impression and the generation of meaning is far higher than the words. Haptics is the study of touching during communication, Proxemics is the study of spatial communication and Kinesics is a broader field of nonverbal communication studying body's physical movement, including facial expressions, gestures, body movement, and posture. Words cannot work in isolation. They must be accompanied by the nonverbal and paralinguistic features to give meanings. Appearance, being just a fragment of nonverbal communication, conveys huge share of information, both in the presence and absence of the verbal accompaniment. Oral communication is accompanied by appearance of two kinds, namely personal appearance and appearance of the surroundings. It is with the help of appearance that words succeed in creating a good deal of impression upon the listener. During conversation or speech a speaker's personal appearance and appearance of their surroundings give nonverbal stimuli that affect and generate attitudes towards the words uttered by the speaker.

### **Literature Review:**

Stevick (1982:163), "if verbal communication is the pen which spells out details, nonverbal communication provides the surface on which the words are written and against which they must be interpreted."<sup>1</sup> Nonverbal cues can be used very successfully for the display of different emotions and meanings during conversation. "To signal attentiveness, interactors use proximity, orientation, gaze, head nods, alert posture and bodily movements"<sup>2</sup> (Argyle 1976:72). Nonverbal cues are very important means of ascertaining a communicator's real intent and sincerity. Examination of a speaker's body motion accompanying his speech revealed that the points of change occurring in the flow of his sound perfectly coincided with the points of change occurring in his body movement<sup>3</sup> (Kendon, 1974).

Loveday (1982:91) says, "paralinguage the vocal, kinesic (gestural) and proxemic

(Spatial) channels which accompany, interfuse and partly synchronize the traditionally recognized ones.”<sup>4</sup> Expressions of face, eye contact, gestures, distance between conversation participants, silence, voice modification factors, and touching play significant role in human interaction. A permanent interplay continues between different channels of communication, and verbal expression is merely a facet of the multi-modal process of communication between different persons. “Whatever language, or whatever the purpose in communication, informational or expressive, emotions and attitudes always project themselves in an overlay of superimposed patterns”<sup>5</sup> (Key 1975:9). Paralanguage is defined by The 1984 ERIC as the “study of those aspects of speech communication that do not pertain to linguistic structure or content, for example, vocal qualifiers, intonation, and body language”<sup>6</sup> (Houston 1984:185). Proxemic signs help in calculating the smoothness of interaction or the opposition among its participants. Similarly, for doing a comprehensive analysis of a piece of communication, it is necessary to include items that are related to the areas of kinesics and paralanguage along with language<sup>7</sup> (Trager 1958).

Cultures differ in the interpretation and use of nonverbal cues. Children in Japan are prohibited from having a direct eye contact with people<sup>8</sup> (Morsbach 1973). Keeping the gaze down during conversation signifies respect for the other conversation participant in various cultures from the East too. This trait can be misconceived in the West<sup>9</sup> (Levy 1979, Wolfgang 1979) where it is misinterpreted as a sign of guilt. Japanese society considers silence as a superb quality. “A mouth is to eat with, not to speak with” is a Japanese proverb valuing silence very much.”

Murphy, Peck, and O'Neill (1988) state that clothing, neatness hairstyles, cosmetics, jewelry, stature and posture, are part and parcel of personal appearance. They help the listeners in getting impressions regarding the speakers' occupation, their age, their nationality, their social and economic statuses, their job status, and their poor or good judgment, on the basis of circumstances. Similarly appearance of the surroundings also carries impressions with it<sup>10</sup>. According to them when people communicate orally, appearance of surroundings comprising aspects like size of the room where communication is taking place, its location, its architecture, its lighting, its belongings in the shape of machines, stationary, items of decoration, colours, type of floor, its building material, its windows and doors, its ventilation and other things play important role in affecting and colouring the meaning.<sup>11</sup>

According to the research of Birdwhistell (1970), the proportion of social meaning conveyed by words in a conversation or interaction probably ranges

not higher than 30 to 35 percent.<sup>12</sup> these figures have come to be endorsed and trusted by majority of the people because many a researchers now cite that paralinguistic channels carry 65 percent of the total communicative meaning. Mehrabian and Ferris (1967) also have given figures regarding due share of importance of the different types of nonverbal and paralinguistic features during communication, according to which face carries 55, tone carries 38, and words carry 7 percent of importance in communication. However their relative role can move up or down depending upon the context, the individual, and the culture related to communication.<sup>13</sup> Abercrombie (1968:55) enlightens us beautifully over the relationship between language and paralanguage when he says, "We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our whole body."<sup>14</sup> Nonverbal behavior is very natural and its sincerity cannot be suspected because it is automatic and natural accompaniment of verbal behavior. We may feign a lie but we cannot feign or conceal our natural nonverbal behavior accompanying the verbal behaviour that much successfully. It is due to this reason that they are so much effective in creating impression. "Nonverbal leakage"<sup>15</sup> (Ekman and Friesen 1974) may often betray what words do not. Freud (1905: 77-78), states, "he that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. "<sup>16</sup>

### **Data Analysis and Discussion:**

#### **1: Kinesics**

##### ***Facial Expressions***

The Holy Prophet neither recommended nor made signs with eyebrows and eyes to revile others.

When Abdullah bin Saad, who had been condemned to death, approached the Holy Prophet, asked forgiveness and extended his hand in allegiance, the Holy prophet refused to accept it but accepted it reluctantly when he asked it for the third time. Then, Muhammad addressed his companions, "Why didn't you kill him although you could see my attitude?" His Companions said, "O Prophet of Allah! We would have killed him, if you had given us just a gesture with your eye". Upon it the Holy Prophet (pbuh) said, "Treason does not suit the eyes of Prophets."<sup>17</sup>

Even the looks of the Holy Prophet were very expressive in transmitting his intent and ideas.

"Hassan (ra) says about the Prophet (pbuh): "His looks were very meaningful  
.... "<sup>18</sup>

##### ***Eye-contact***

He could not look at the face of someone except for a brief moment because of his shyness<sup>19</sup>.

Lack of eye-contact, considered a sign of guilt in the West, is considered a positive value and encouraged in most countries of the East. Due to modesty Muhammad (pbuh) could not keep eye-contact with other conversation partner save for a brief moment. However, he would not look away from the conversation participants' faces, unless they would turn away their faces. Becoming happy, he would lower his gaze due to modesty.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Countenance***

Abu Saeed Al-Khudri (ra), narrated: "The Prophet of Allah happened to be more bashful than even a virgin covered by her veil. When he would witness a thing that he would dislike, it could be perceived by us on his face."<sup>21</sup>

His countenance reflected his inner feelings without support of words, showing that he had no hypocrisy inside. Due to this, his companions around would appreciate the seriousness or otherwise of a situation without asking. His face would get brightened up when he would meet ones whom he loved much.

### ***Gestures***

Anas bin Malik (ra), who witnessed Muhammad making gestures to explain the abstract concept of knocking at the door of the paradise, said, "When Muhammad (pbuh) reported, 'I shall be the first one to knock at the door of Paradise', he demonstrated how he would be holding the doorknocker, I can imagine it still."<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, when he advised Muadh bin Jabal (ra), he actually held his tongue with his own hand and said, "Control this."<sup>23</sup>

Hind bin Abi Hala while describing the Holy Prophet says that when he would be astonished he would turn his hand over. During conversation, he would strike the palm of the left hand on his right-hand thumb and when he would point out someone, he would use his whole hand; when he would be angry, then he would move his face away and when he would feel joyful he would lower his gaze.<sup>24</sup>

Instead of pointing with figure-which is rude- he would point with the whole hand. This shows how much consideration and courtesy he had for others.

While talking, the Prophet would use his fingers and hands more than the other organs and would make an active use of his gestures and staff for explaining and getting listeners' attention. One time he pounded his pulpit with his staff and said, "It is Tayba (Madinah). Harken attentively! I informed you that Dajjal (Anti-Christ) would be unable to enter Makkah and Madinah."<sup>25</sup>

### ***Appearance***

The appearance of the Holy Prophet was not less effective in making his conversation attractive and charming. Hind bin Abi Hala describes the appearance of the Holy Prophet by saying that his laughter would be limited to a smile; however, whenever he would laugh his teeth would appear like white hailstones.<sup>26</sup> These qualities are such that during conversation they add to the esteem and dignity of a person and saves the other from offending. Hind bin Abi Hala continues that he would neither humiliate another person nor would like it for himself to be treated disrespectfully.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Posture***

When he talked, he would look at the addressee's face and if he would hold the hand of the addressee, he would not let go hold of their hand till the addressee withdrew hand; he did not turn away his face away unless the addressee did so. Whenever a person would whisper in his ear, he would not move his head away unless the speaker did it.<sup>28</sup> Hind bin Abi Hala says that he used to sit down in the rear wherever he went and advised others to do like him. During meetings he would give so much attention to each one that each of them considered himself being given notice more than others. In case someone asked him to listen to their story or to sit with them, he would listen to them with patience and would remain attentive until they had finished speaking and had left of their own accord.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Smile***

“His laughing was in the form of smiling.”<sup>30</sup>

His laughter would be to the extent of a smile, not more than it, to be understood as offensive.

"He would smile excessively before his companions..."<sup>31</sup>

Smile is a costless tool that brings others closer; Muhammad (pbuh) recommended smiling to other Muslims and always maintained a smiling face himself.

Abdullah Ibn Haarith (ra) said: “I never witnessed a person who smiled much as the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).”<sup>32</sup>

While meeting people, he always smiled save when he saw somebody in wrongdoing. His ever-smiling face indicated friendliness and his welcoming conduct attracted others to talk to him.

The Holy Prophet said: “It is charity to smile in the face of your brother.”<sup>33</sup>

Giving positive expressions also earns for one the blessings of Allah and is actually an act of charity. Giving a smile before a conversation kicks off, is helpful in defusing all the feelings of displeasure generated in the past and is a source of ease for both the receiver and the giver.

### ***Cheerful looks and disposition***

Face tells about mind. A smiling face represents a jolly temperament. He had a cheerful and ever-smiling face. His sadness would not be visible to depress others.

"He was the most cheerful and friendly person among people."<sup>34</sup>

Abdullah bin Haarith (ra) says: "I have never seen anybody making another person cheerful more than the Holy Prophet (pbuh)." <sup>35</sup>

Due to his cheerfulness it would pleasure one talking to him. Howsoever sincere one may be, one's excessive and perpetual seriousness drives others away.

Anas bin Malik (ra) says:"The Holy Prophet would (pbuh) mingle with us and would cut jokes."<sup>36</sup>

Jovial gestures help one in relieving others' stress, apart from inviting others for conversation.

Anas bin Malik (ra) narrates: "The Holy Prophet was the one who cut jokes with children the most."<sup>37</sup> "The Holy Prophet was one who cut jokes with his wives the most."<sup>38</sup>

The weaker section of society, in need of care and love, were made to feel relieved and pleased by the Holy Prophet (pbuh) with his jokes. However, this was not the cheap and harmful mirth achieved by embarrassing others; Anas b. Malik (ra) reported: "The Holy Prophet (pbuh) called me 'two-eared'."<sup>39</sup> He understood the proper limits of humour. Once he said, "Do not have arguments with your friend; do not cut jokes on him; when you promise something with your friend, observe it," The people present said, "O Prophet of Allah! You also cut jokes." He replied, "Yes, I also do it but even when I cut a joke, I say the truth."<sup>40</sup>

### **2: Haptics:**

In the field of Haptics, which studies touching during communication, Muhammad (pbuh) used his hands and body effectively. According to the Quran, Muhammad (pbuh) put his own hand over the hands of other Muslims for accepting their allegiance.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Handshake***

Abu Huraira (ra) said: "The Prophet (pbuh) did not withdraw his hand from another till the latter withdrew his."<sup>42</sup> Handshake helps in building up trust and affinity and removing apprehensions of parties. Handshake accompanied his greetings in favour of which he says, "No two Muslims meet each other and shake hands, but they are forgiven before they part."<sup>43</sup>

### ***Body Contact***

Muhammad's (pbuh) used his touch for expressing his consideration and effect-

ion. Abdullah Ibn Masood (ra) said: "The Holy Prophet (pbuh) taught me the Tashahhud, holding my hand between his hands, just as he used to teach me a Surah from the Quran."<sup>44</sup> Abd-Allah ibn Jafar (ra) said: "One day we met Prophet (pbuh), Hassan, Hussein and I. He carried one of us in front of him, and another on his back, until we entered Madina."<sup>45</sup>

For expressing love and affection, Muhammad (pbuh) used to embrace, smell, kiss and hug his grandsons and children. Usama (ra), bin Zaid says: "Allah's Apostle (pbuh) used to put me on (one of) his thighs and Al-Hassan bin 'Ali on his other thigh, and then embrace us"<sup>46</sup>. Anas bin Malik (ra) said: "The Prophet (pbuh) kissed and smelled (his son) Ibrahim."<sup>47</sup>

According to Anas bin Malik (ra), the Prophet (pbuh) used to often call his grandchildren, Hassan and Hussein, over to him and cuddle them.<sup>48</sup> He used to say, "Hasan and Husain are my basilis that I smell in this world."<sup>49</sup> Sometimes he gave advice to children while caressing their hair, which brought them closer to him emotionally and physically.

Similarly he would kiss and hug his close companions and relatives when they would arrive from long journeys. He fortified his association and affection with people by establishing body contact with them. He kissed his daughter Fatima on the forehead, and sat on her bed. When he returned victorious from Khyber and at the same time Jafar (ra) returned after thirteen years of propagation, Muhammad (pbuh) kissed Jafar (ra) between his two eyes and said, "I do not know which thing made me happier, the conquest of Khyber or the coming back of Jafar."<sup>50</sup>

### **3: Proxemics:**

In terms of spatial communication, due to his humbleness, he never fixed any prominent position in a gathering for himself and would sit in such a less conspicuous position that he would not be recognizable for a stranger coming from outside. While conversing, he would prefer to sit where everyone would be at equal distance from him, to treat everyone with fairness and respect.<sup>51</sup>

### **4: Paralinguistic Features of Rate, Volume, Tone, Emphasis**

Paralinguistic features count a lot in the communication of ideas successfully.

#### ***Silence***

Muhammad (pbuh) used silence for protection against the curses of tongue. He abstained from idle talking, but his silence sometimes meant granting leniency or granting approval to what he witnessed or heard. He would scarcely say 'no' and preferred silence where he was supposed to say 'no'. "When somebody would like him to do a thing, he would respond with 'yes'; in case he was unwilling to do something, he would remain silent."<sup>52</sup> (Ramuz al-Ahadith). Silence saves

against curses related to tongue, like describing Allah without sound knowledge, backbiting, slandering, tale-bearing, lying, reviling, criticizing, cursing and insulting.

### ***Rate***

Words spoken per unit of time constitutes rate on which depends understanding of the idea being transmitted. The lower the rate, the better is the understanding of the idea. The rate of the Holy Prophet's speech would be appropriate to the assimilation of the idea being transmitted. He talked slowly so that any person could get him easily. Aisha (ra) reports: "The Holy Prophet (PBUH) would speak slowly; it would be so much slow that if one had tried to count his words, he/she could have counted them. He did not speak words hurriedly and in quick succession as is done by you."<sup>53</sup> (Bukhari). Muhammad (pbuh) would not speak in a hurried manner; he would utter words one by one so that everyone could comprehend.<sup>54</sup> Aisha (ra) says: "Muhammad (pbuh) would speak in a way that the words would be spaced out, so that those who would be sitting with him would remember them."<sup>55</sup>

### ***Articulation***

Uttering words clearly, completely and discretely results in better audibility and better understanding for the listener. Aisha (ra) refers to this quality of the Holy Prophet's speech, when she says, "Rasulullah's (pbuh) speech would not be quick and continuous like that of yours. He would speak lucidly, word by word."<sup>56</sup>and "His words were clear. Anybody who listened to him understood him easily."<sup>57</sup>

### ***Volume***

Aisha (ra) narrates, "He also abstained from speaking loudly in the markets, in a manner to disturb the folks"<sup>58</sup>. (Tirmidhi)

Following the injunction of Allah inside the Quran, 'And keep your voice lowered; verily, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys'<sup>59</sup>, the Holy Prophet kept his voice appropriately low and paid attention to the volume and tone of his voice. Raising one's voice indicates lack of manners, unless demanded, such as when giving a sermon, or when issuing a warning to someone, or when teaching, or when speaking out to be heard. On the other hand, Muhammad (pbuh) also abstained from the irritating manner of lowering of voice more than needed or keeping the volume unchanged throughout.

### ***Tone***

Building or breaking of a relationship is highly dependent over the tone of the speaker's voice.

A minor degree of heightening in the speaker's tone or loudness causes a break-up in relationship. The tone of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) used to be very

soft, "He was always cheerful, gentle and mild."<sup>60</sup> "He was the softest and most kind of all people..."<sup>61</sup>

To avoid face-threatening and to do face-saving, a conversation participant should keep their voice pleasant and low. Raising one's voice offends and creates a bad impression over the other participant. Raised tone and volume disparages the addressee and is considered bad manners. Despite wielding the highest type of authority at one time, Muhammad (pbuh) never threatened another person's face, not even of his opponents or persecutors.

### ***Repetition***

As some complex and vital points need repetition and slow speed for emphasis and proper assimilation, so Muhammad (pbuh) would repeat such points thrice for their better inculcation and memorization. Anas (ra) reports: "The Holy Prophet would repeat his words thrice when he would say something, in order for the meanings to be fully understood."<sup>62</sup>(Al Bukhari)

Anas Ibn Malik (ra) reports: "The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) would repeat his expression thrice so that it is memorized."<sup>63</sup> (Tirmidhi)

### **Conclusion:**

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) used his nonverbal communication and paralanguage excellently; he talked a politely and always kept his tone low and soft. His speed was slow enough to let his ideas be understood and remembered. He repeated important things thrice to let them sink into the mind and heart of the listener. He used his hands efficiently for elaboration. He avoided using eyebrows and eyes and disliked their use for reviling others. His expressions were always cheerful and welcoming. For expressing his happiness he smiled instead of laughing. His touch made the effect of his emotions and feelings accentuated. His kissing, caressing, and hugging of his beloveds and family members was caused by his sincerity and affection and communicated the same to others. He never tried to free his hand or look away if someone held his hand or looked at him. He preferred silence and exercised control over his tongue by using it only when it was needed for positive purposes. His posture was such that he would be all ears to others and every one would think that he/she is being given a special treatment. While talking in a gathering, he would never focus over a few special ones but would look at everyone equally. He never appropriated for himself a distinctive position in a gathering and preferred a position that would be near to everyone equally. He would tolerate derogative comments and reciprocated them with patience, silence and smile.

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- <sup>57</sup>G.A Ziyaüddin, 1997,Ramuz El-Hadis,2.Cilt,Conca Yayinevi,Istanbul,521/4
- <sup>58</sup><http://www.resulullah.org/en/expression-talking-style>
- <sup>59</sup>Qura'an 31: 19
- <sup>60</sup><http://www.alinaam.org.za/LIBRARY/pallah.htm>
- <sup>61</sup><http://www.salaam.co.uk/knowledge /ruqaiyyah4.php158>
- <sup>62</sup>Riyadhulsaleeheen Albaani, IslamKotob, number: 853
- <sup>63</sup><http://www.resulullah.org/en/expression-talking-style>

