

**Public Speaking**  
**Prof. Binod Mishra**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology - Roorkee**

**Lecture: 27**  
**Meta-communication**

Good morning friends and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Public Speaking. Dear friends, you might all well remember that in the previous lectures, we had been talking about the various facets of non-verbals. And today we are going to touch upon the last facet or the last type of Non- verbal communication that is meta communication. On most of the occasions whenever you hear the word meta- communication, you have several questions in your mind as to what meta- communication could be.

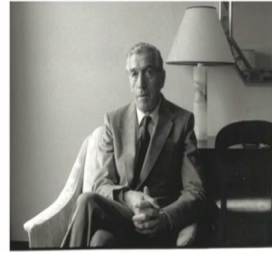
Is it another form of non-verbal communication? Yes, you have guessed it right. Meta-communication in one word can be the sum and substance of all sorts of non verbal communication but then why I need to do it separately as a lecture has got some purpose of course we have touched upon kinesics, proxemics, chronemics, para language but then nonetheless better language is also very important.

Now today we will see what could come under Meta- communication and why this is so important. On several occasions, you might have found that even though a speaker speaks there are certain things that he leaves for the audience to extract. I mean not everything can be said only in words even when we leave some gaps, even when some amount of space is left ,even when we leave or we bring a sort of variety in terms of our style in terms of our tone in terms of our voice as the other day we had discussed we find that that has also got some meaning into it.

Now, here you can take one observation by Watzlawick, who in his book *Pragmatics of Human Communication* actually said something which is very important from the point of view of meta- communication. Now, let us read these in order to understand the nitty gritty of metal communication.

**(Refer Slide Time: 03:26)**

“When we no longer use communication to communicate but to *communicate about communication*, as we inevitably must in communication research, then we use conceptualizations that are not part of but about communication. This is called *Meta-communication*. (288)”



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY

- Paul Watzlawick in his book *Pragmatics of Human Communication*

What Paul Watzlawick in his book says is----“ When we no longer use communication to communicate but to communicate about communication as we inevitably must in communication research, then we use conceptualizations that are not part of but about communication. This is called Meta- communication.” So, in one word what we derive out of this is meta communication is actually a sort of communication about communication.

Now is not it a very puzzling thing that we are talking about communication and then we say communication about communication is called meta- communication. Actually it is a new order of communication that arose in the evolution of mammals and that explains some distinctively complex, creative, and deeply paradoxical qualities of social interaction.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:41)**

## Introduction

- Gregory Bateson and Jurgen Ruesch introduced the term meta-communication in 1951.
- It was through their publication of the book *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*.
- The term means “communication about communication”.
- Meta-communication refers to one’s ability to convey multiple messages simultaneously.
- It is a secondary form of communication on meaning-making and interpretation.



Communication about Communication

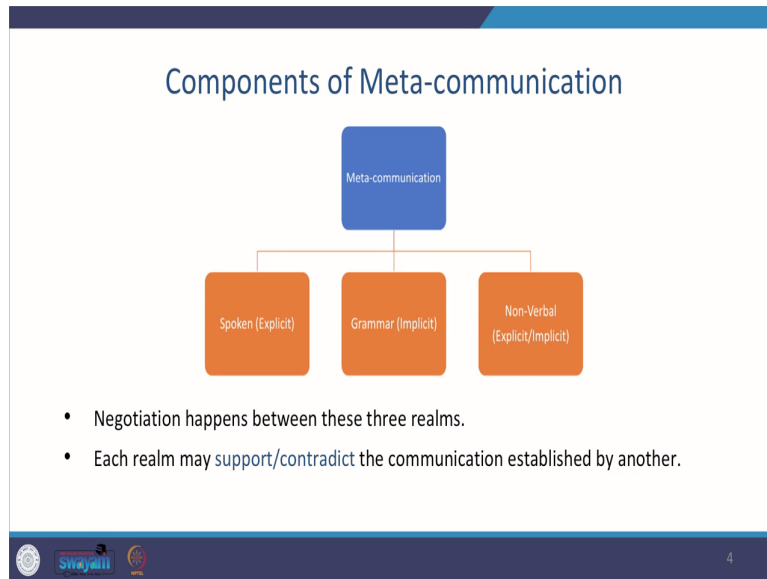
So, when we talk about meta communication as we have been saying that it is communication about communication. Now most of us would rather be interested to know how this was introduced. Gregory Bateson and Jurgen Ruesch introduced the term meta- communication in 1951 in their book *The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*. The full title of the book is *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*.

And this term meta- communication, according to these two authors, means communication about communication. In fact, it refers to one's ability to convey multiple messages simultaneously. Now, we have been saying and we have also been seeing that when we make use of a word, we have a meaning but since human beings are very complex creatures, at times, when they use a word they also might be having some other meanings which can be considered to be a sort of implicit meaning, which he does not explain clearly.

Now, meta- communication is a form of communication on meaning- making. That is why we, at times, say that do not try to extract the verbal meaning only, rather a sentence can have some hidden meanings also and this actually requires a sort of proper interpretation. My dear friends, of course, when we look at animals the way they interact with each other, we find and we observe that, that has got a meaning.

But then human language is very complex and with the same word, at times we try to please a person. On other occasions we try to displease a person. At times the same word may be a compliment and the same word can also be a sort of paradox, the same word can also be a sort of sarcastic remark. Now what could be the components of Meta- communication, I mean, when two people we have already been saying in previous lectures that communication results out of two people out of two persons' interaction. But then there are other things also which are associated, which perhaps, at times, we do not take into consideration but that has got some meaning.

**(Refer Slide Time: 07:41)**



Of course, when we talk about the components of meta-communication, we find that it can be used in spoken, where it is spoken is not it where it is communicated through words but at times it can be implicit also. For example, if you are an avid reader and if you can read in between the lines. Now from grammar you can find that several sorts of sign posts or marks of punctuation actually provide some more meaning to a particular sentence.

And, of course, when it is in spoken form non-verbals, as we have been saying, they are at times explicit, they are at times implicit also, and in order to draw the meaning in order to extract the meaning there is actually a negotiation between the speaker and the receiver, between the speaker and the listener, and of course the role of ambience, the role of surrounding, the role of the tone of voice, the role of other features also cannot be denied, my dear friend.

So, negotiation happens between these three realms and each realm may support at times. It may support but at times it may also contradict the communication which is established by another, that is why when we shall be doing negotiation, I will perhaps discuss in detail how one has to be very careful at each and every action of the communicator, I mean, the other person's change of face, change of tone, change of voice and of course the value.

**(Refer Slide Time: 09:35)**

## Examples of Meta-communication

Stephen Tyler in his book *Said and the Unsaid* illustrates a few examples of meta-communication being direct and indirect in nature :

Direct (What is being said)	Indirect (How it is said)
I'm only joking	Tone of voice
This is serious	Intonation
When I say X, I mean Y	Gestures
This is only hearsay, but...	Posture
I heard that...	Eye movements
I'm speaking to you as a friend	Facial Expression



Now let us also try to have some examples of meta communication in this regard a mention may be made of Stephen Tyler's book which is entitled *Said and Unsaid* look at the title of the book it is very beautiful poetic rather. So, Stephen Tyler in his book *Said and Unsaid* illustrates certain examples of meta which can at times be direct and at times be indirect. Now, on the one hand in this table you can find on the one hand, there are examples of direct which can be said. On the other hand, you find there are indirect expressions which cannot be said. Now, say for example ,if somebody says I am only joking this is serious when I say X, I mean Y this is only here say fine I heard that I am speaking to you as a friend but there are certain the same sentences are there but these sentences also leave room for some unsaid. For,some indirect what are their tone of voice the way you said I am only joking.

Fine, intonation fine. This is serious this. Is this serious fine? and then comes gestures postures other movement of the eyes and of course your facial expressions which we have already discussed in our lecture on kinesics.

**(Refer Slide Time: 11:01)**

## Metalanguage

- Logician Alfred Tarski introduced the term “metalanguage” in the year 1933.
- Like meta-communication, it implies the employment of language to understand better about language.
- In metalanguage, language evolves from being a means of communication (process) to the reason (cause) of communication in itself.
- Metalanguage essentially comprises *grammar* as its fundamental aspect.
- Grammatical knowledge enables participants to have a proper grip on metalinguistic abilities.



Now this meta communication actually gives rise to metal language. Now how this metal language came into being the famous logician Alfred Tarskey introduced the term meta language in the year 1933 like meta communication this meta language also employs the employment of language to understand better about language. What is said is said but what is not said also has got some language in meta language.

Language actually comes out of a means of communication, I mean, through the process, through reason that is the cause of communication in itself it actually comprises grammar. That is why if you really want to have a test of meta- communication. Listen to the dialogues in a movie in a theatre in a play and you can find sometimes even though the character speaks only half sentence at times the character murmurs but that also has got a meaning.

So, grammatical knowledge helps participants to have a proper grip on meta linguistic abilities that is why you might have found that in a play different characters speak differently but then as readers we understand the meaning and the way the dialogues have been are delivered. Now, we can also explore something about meta- communication in Indian background.

**(Refer Slide Time: 12:44)**

## Meta-communication in Indian Background

- Tarski's concept of metalanguage was introduced to the field of Indian logic and grammar in the year 1962.
- Scholars like Staal and Scharfe juxtaposed metalanguage with Panini's grammar for critical study.
- Frits Staal argues that the ideas on meta-communication were prevalent in ancient Indian discourses themselves.
  - *Upadeśa* (the language of grammatical instruction)
  - *Anubandha* (metalinguistic marker)

Tarsky's concept of material language was also introduced to the field of Indian logic and grammar in the year 1962. In this regard, various scholars like Stall and Scharfe juxtapose meta- language with Panini's grammar for critical study. Stahl argues that the ideas of metro communication had been there since ancient times in Indian discourses and the examples can be best found when there is a sort of *Upadhesa* or instructions the language of grammatical instruction, is not it?

You find that when the riches of Vedas when they are pronounced, it is actually said the way they are pronounced they actually lend meaning to it. And then comes *Anuband* that is meta linguistic marker you can find in most of the Indian scriptures there are different types of meta markers which actually tell the readers as to what could be the possible meanings or why there is a break, why there is a continuity why there is an aberration.

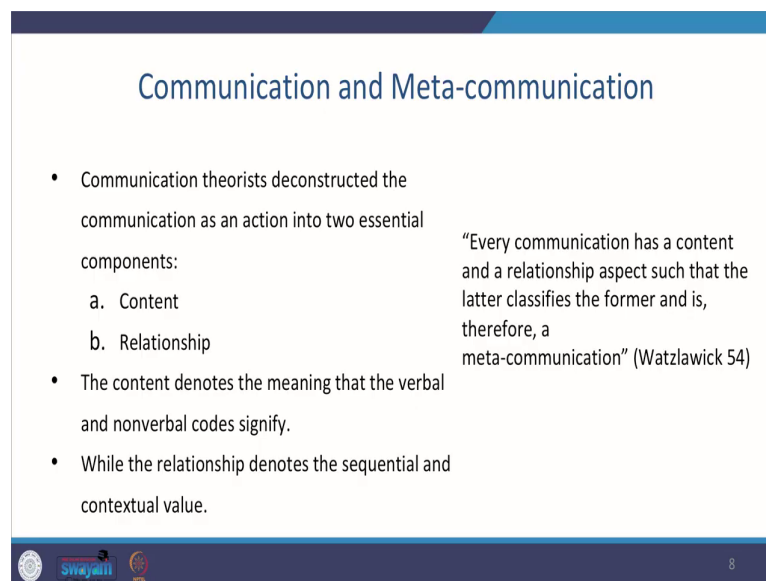
So, all these actually have a great role to play in terms of communication. Now, when we talk about meta---- communication and we have a look at the theorists they actually say that in order to understand something effectively, or to get the effective meaning of a particular as a thread of thought or a particular sentence content is very important, relationship is very important, context is very important.

Let me give you an example. If somebody asks you---“ Are you going to join me for the theatre today?’ And the response that comes--- I have to appear at an examination tomorrow. Now let us look at this exchange what do we find we actually find that while in the first speaker's speech there is a sort of invitation. In the second one's, who replies we find that

there is a sort of decline there is a sort of refusal but then he does not make use of any negative.

Now how did you come to know it? He simply provides you the reason that he has his examination or his papers tomorrow the meaning is and how the speaker comes to get the meaning out of it the speaker actually extracts out of the context, meaning thereby for him this time is not for examination because this time is not for revelry for rejoicing. So, the content denotes the meaning that the verbal and the non-verbal codes signify.

**(Refer Slide Time: 15:55)**



The slide is titled "Communication and Meta-communication" in blue text. It contains a bulleted list of points and a quote. The first bullet point states that communication theorists deconstructed communication into two essential components: Content and Relationship. The second bullet point explains that content denotes the meaning of verbal and nonverbal codes, while the relationship denotes sequential and contextual value. A quote from Watzlawick (1954) is also included: "Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is, therefore, a meta-communication". The slide footer includes logos for Swajee and a page number 8.

### Communication and Meta-communication

- Communication theorists deconstructed the communication as an action into two essential components:
  - a. Content
  - b. Relationship
- The content denotes the meaning that the verbal and nonverbal codes signify.
- While the relationship denotes the sequential and contextual value.

"Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is, therefore, a meta-communication" (Watzlawick 54)

And, of course, on many occasions you might have found that the relationship matters a lot and during these relationships, I mean two people who are intimately related distinctly related closely related sometimes they provide you some sort of indications or markers, even when they make use of words but in a very implicit manner. Now, in this regard it would rather be very pertinent if we can take Watzlawick expression or quote.

When he says---“ Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter I mean the relationship classifies the former and is therefore a meta communication.” I have already given you an example, my dear friends and you might have been able to extract. Now, when you talk about meta communication as I have been saying that it is communication about communication and if we can take this word literally it means beyond communication meta is beyond and communication is communication.

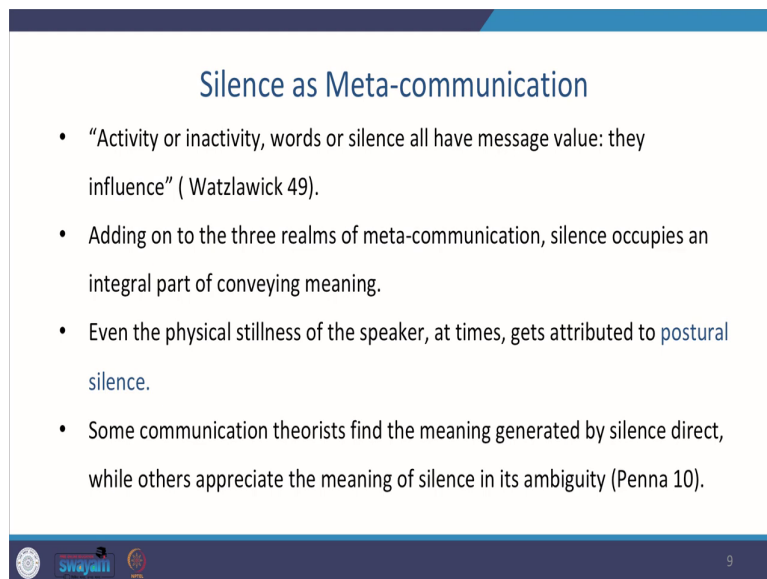


So, there can be so many things which can lend meaning to it. Imagine you are going for a presentation you are well prepared, well prepared in terms of content but then you do some other preparation also. You choose a particular dress, you also think of the venue, you also think of the acoustics and you time and again you practice your own voice as to when your voice will go up and when the voice will come down or when you will try to maintain a sort of neutrality in order to drive home your point.

So, in this regard you can find that especially the novice speakers who are not trained to make use of meta- communication, they perhaps do not attach any importance to all these things. What they simply do is they actually remember everything and they want to vomit it out in a presentation. But then they should realize that there are other meta- communicative features which will work namely silence.

Silence is communication, my dear friends you realize it or not because silence speaks a lot silence sometimes speak more than words can.

**(Refer Slide Time: 18:27)**



The slide is titled "Silence as Meta-communication" and contains the following text:

- "Activity or inactivity, words or silence all have message value: they influence" ( Watzlawick 49).
- Adding on to the three realms of meta-communication, silence occupies an integral part of conveying meaning.
- Even the physical stillness of the speaker, at times, gets attributed to postural silence.
- Some communication theorists find the meaning generated by silence direct, while others appreciate the meaning of silence in its ambiguity (Penna 10).

The slide footer includes a logo on the left, the text "swjain" in the center, and the number "9" on the right.

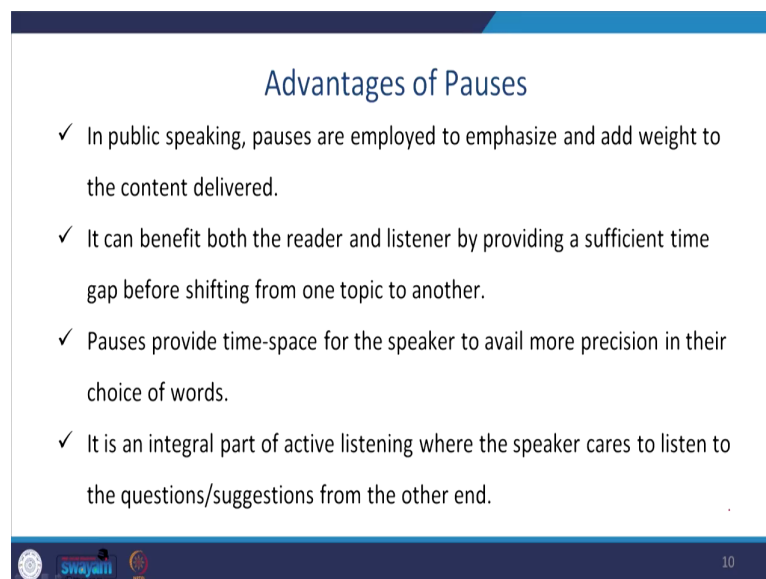
So, activity or inactivity as Watzlawick says-- words of silence all have got message value they influence, of course, if we have to add to these three realms of meta communication silence occupies an integral part of conveying meaning. If I refer to one of the previous lectures where I said silence ignites, silence conceals, silence reveals, silence voices, silence rejoices. My dear friends, when you are giving a presentation or speaking in public, silence has got an upper hand at times.

If a person does not know how to situate silence and pauses in his talk perhaps he will be a great bore and the listeners to time and again keep looking at the wrist watches as to when the time should come to an end, so that they may get relieved of this Cisco Medallion lecture even the physical stillness of the speaker physical stillness of the speaker if you are a little bit silent, at times gets attributed to postural silence.

Some communication theorists find the meaning generated by silence direct, while others appreciate the meaning of silence in its ambiguity. As I said, silence can be interpreted some sometimes very positively, sometimes it can be understood in a very negative manner but nowadays especially among the youngsters they cannot bear silence, they cannot tolerate silence and hence they are not able to understand at the meaning of silence rather they become so impatient thanks to technology, thanks to computers thanks to internet.

Now, another important feature of network communication are pauses. I have already stated in one of the lectures that if you take a short break, it becomes a pause and the break becomes longer it becomes silence.

**(Refer Slide Time: 20:39)**



The slide is titled "Advantages of Pauses" and lists four points with checkmarks:

- ✓ In public speaking, pauses are employed to emphasize and add weight to the content delivered.
- ✓ It can benefit both the reader and listener by providing a sufficient time gap before shifting from one topic to another.
- ✓ Pauses provide time-space for the speaker to avail more precision in their choice of words.
- ✓ It is an integral part of active listening where the speaker cares to listen to the questions/suggestions from the other end.

At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "Swayam" and "10".

In Public Speaking, pauses are employed to emphasize and add weight to the content delivered. One cannot speak continuously spontaneously because one has always to keep into consideration the audience's receptivity and that is why pauses become a must. Pauses can benefit both the speaker as well as the listeners as I have been saying-- the speakers get the breathing time and the listeners get a time to relate a time to understand.

Pauses provide time and space to the speaker to avail more precision in their choice of words. Both silence and pauses are integral part of active listening. You might have found when we were discussing listening, we had already said that those who can listen better only can speak better, is not it. So, if you really want to involve yourself into active listening pauses are essential pauses of the speakers.

Fine? When the speakers care to listen to the questions or suggestions from the other end in an offline classroom you might have realized that when a teacher poses a question, the teacher suddenly stops, waits for the answer and this actually gives a thinking time to the listeners. So, is the case when we give a presentation or a talk. So, providing them with a momentary relief let me call it a sort of comic relief for them.

If the entire part is so boring as a speaker, you can provide some momentary reliefs to your audience members. Now in all these silence and pauses and other meta- communicative features there is a sort of meta message.

**(Refer Slide Time: 22:46)**

The slide is titled "Meta-message" and contains the following text:

- ❖ An underlying meaning.
- ❖ A metamessage is what is communicated but not said.
- ❖ It could be understood when read between the lines.
- ❖ It conveys the speaker's attitude and feelings.

Below the list is a diagram with two labels on the left: "Message" and "Meta-Message". "Message" is connected by a bracket to a blue box containing "• Literal meaning". "Meta-Message" is connected by a bracket to a blue box containing "• Implied meaning".

At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "Swigati" and "11".

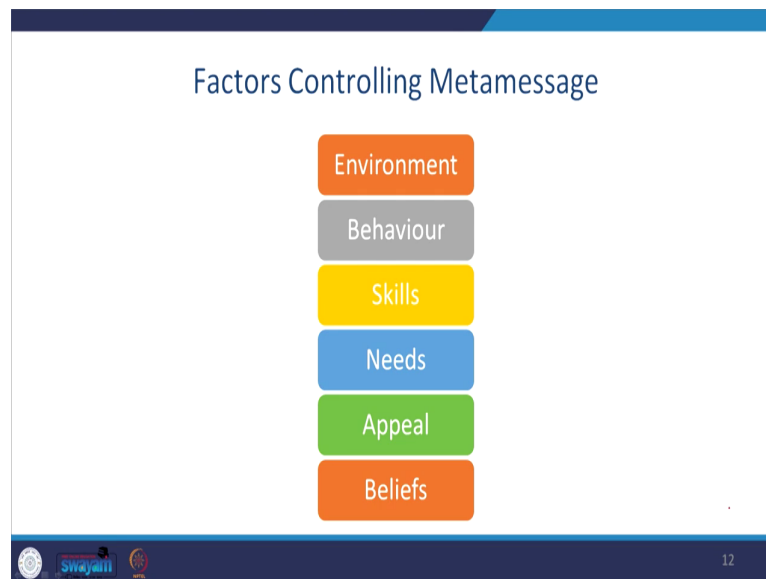
And this meta- message has to be extracted or analysed very carefully because there is an underlying meaning a meta-messages. Now since you know in poetry you can find this is this is actually the best way where you will find the poets throw some words and then you can find the gaps and the gaps speak and the gaps mean is not it. So, it could be understood when you, read between the lines you might have realized when you might be reciting a poetic piece.

Very beautifully are the speaker or the person reciting provides or makes a beautiful use of silence and pauses. It also especially in presentations and talks it also tells you the attitude and the feelings of the speaker. So, when we simply provide the message we provide them the literal message but when we are conscious of leaving something as a sort of meta-communication this meta communication or meta message is an implied meaning.

We have already discussed how in different cultures silence and pauses are treated differently. Is silence can be unnerving in many countries for many people whereas silence can be a sort of acceptance in many countries but then it may vary my dear friend, depending upon the context depending upon the situation depending upon the topic. Now can we really as speakers control meta message.

Of course, there are certain factors that can help you have a control over meta message. When you prepare a talk or a speech or a say any a situation of public speaking you have to keep all these things into consideration the very first thing is environment.

**(Refer Slide Time: 24:45)**

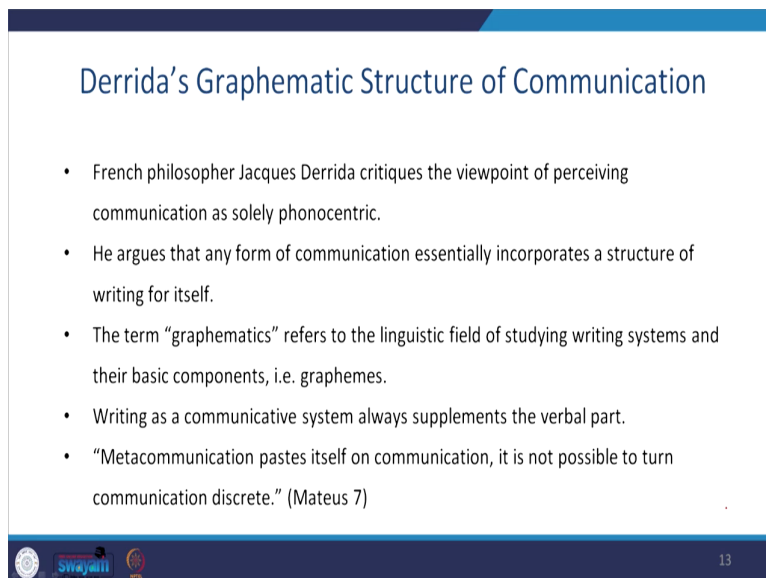


My dear friends, in public speaking you get different occasions, different opportunities but remember it is actually the environment that will add to, that is why when some political negotiations go on, they think of the weather they think of the venue they think of the design of the room they also think of the weather all and they also think of the physical arrangement of furniture as well.

So, environment is one important ingredient of controlling meta- message. Then comes behaviour. The behaviour of the speaker, is not it? Then comes the skills how you are going to say something no a positive message also explained or told with a squint eye can be negative. With the distorted voice can be negative then comes needs. Do you really need this sort of meta- message and then appeal and then beliefs?

So, all these factors are the controlling factors which can help you provide a sort of meta-message. Now let me here bring one you know one critique Derrida. Most of the English people I mean those who are associated with English literature and also with philosophy and sociology might have well listened to the name of Derrida.

**(Refer Slide Time: 26:22)**



The slide is titled "Derrida's Graphematic Structure of Communication" and contains a bulleted list of five points. At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "swayam" and "13".

- French philosopher Jacques Derrida critiques the viewpoint of perceiving communication as solely phonocentric.
- He argues that any form of communication essentially incorporates a structure of writing for itself.
- The term "graphematics" refers to the linguistic field of studying writing systems and their basic components, i.e. graphemes.
- Writing as a communicative system always supplements the verbal part.
- "Metacommunication pastes itself on communication, it is not possible to turn communication discrete." (Mateus 7)

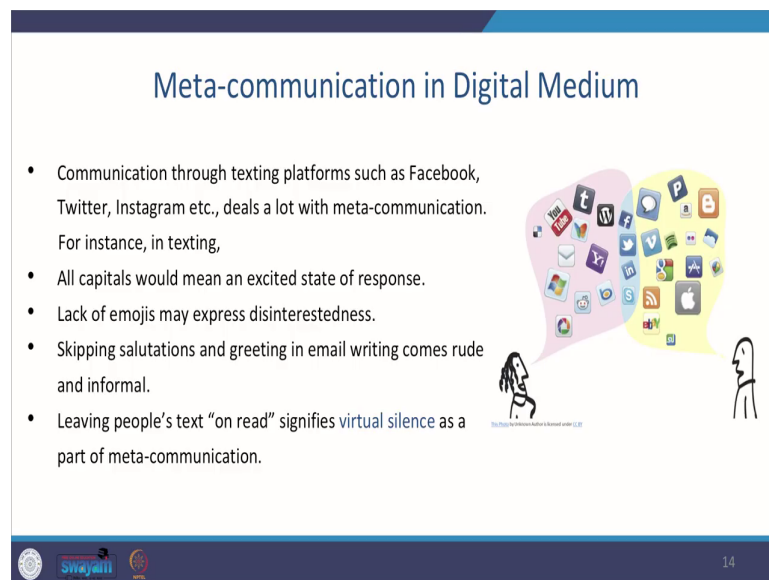
So, Derrida's graphemic structure of communication where this philosopher, this French philosopher critiques the viewpoint of perceiving communication as a solely phono- centric he says that it is not only phono centric I mean what you hear only is not the truth it is not only the sound rather what he says is that it essentially incorporates a structure of writing for itself which he calls graphemes.

So, graphematics--- he refers to graphimatics and then it is actually a field of studying writing systems and their basic components. That is why you might have found that when some diplomatic letters are written every word is a put in a very controlled manner because words mean no doubt words are tricky no doubt but as a speaker or as a user you have to be trickier. So, writing as a communicative system, always supplements the verbal part.

And meta communication according to Mateus it pastes itself on communication it is not possible to turn communication discrete it is not possible to turn communication discrete. So, what is of importance is that you have to according to Derrida you have to understand that only one cannot perceive communication simply as phono- centric rather it can also depend much on graphemes.

Now, it is since we are living in a very advanced technological age where meta communication has also entered digital medium and none but the youngsters they know well how they are making use of these meta- communication because we are living in an age of emojis, fine, where when they converse, there are symbols that speak more communication through texting because we are talking about graphemes here.

**(Refer Slide Time: 28:32)**



**Meta-communication in Digital Medium**

- Communication through texting platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc., deals a lot with meta-communication. For instance, in texting,
- All capitals would mean an excited state of response.
- Lack of emojis may express disinterestedness.
- Skipping salutations and greeting in email writing comes rude and informal.
- Leaving people's text "on read" signifies virtual silence as a part of meta-communication.

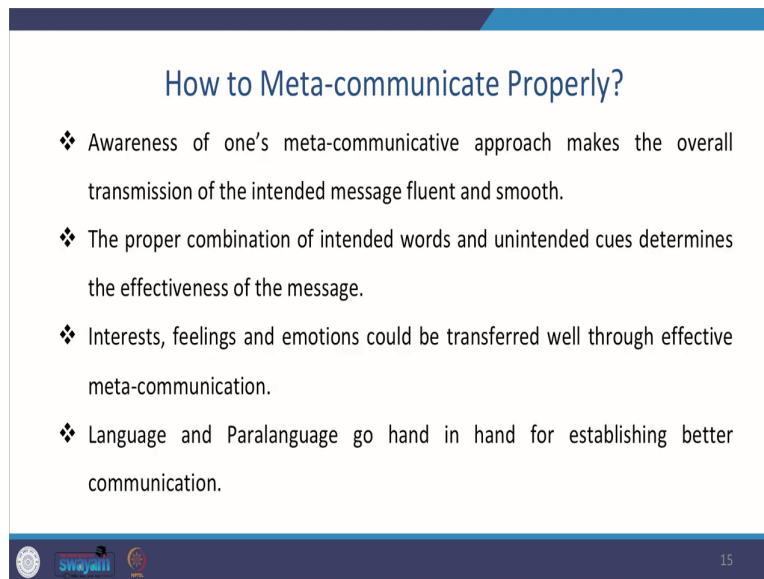
The slide features a graphic of a speech bubble containing various social media icons (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) and a small illustration of a person's head and neck.

So, communication through texting platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and many more. They actually have a lot of room for meta communication. You will you will find that even when you use emails electronic mails ,it is said that if somebody writes everything in capitals means he is shouting, fine. Youngsters especially believe that if they do not provide an emoji in their text perhaps it will result in a sort of disinterestedness. Nowadays there are several emojis several symbols people greet each other every day.

And skipping ---they step salutations and greetings in email fine and that at times becomes very rude is not it. So, leaving people's text on red signifies virtual silence you might have found that on platform like WhatsApp if you send a message you immediately or lately get to

know how do you get to know that your message has been read it is once again with the help of the meta communication when you provide some marker and it is digital my dear friends.

**(Refer Slide Time: 29:49)**



The slide is titled "How to Meta-communicate Properly?" and contains four bullet points. At the bottom left, there are logos for Swajani and a globe, and at the bottom right, the number "15" is displayed.

### How to Meta-communicate Properly?

- ❖ Awareness of one's meta-communicative approach makes the overall transmission of the intended message fluent and smooth.
- ❖ The proper combination of intended words and unintended cues determines the effectiveness of the message.
- ❖ Interests, feelings and emotions could be transferred well through effective meta-communication.
- ❖ Language and Paralanguage go hand in hand for establishing better communication.

Now, we should also understand how one should use meta- communication properly in public speaking one has to be totally aware of one's meta- communicative approach which actually makes the overall transmission of the intended message fluent smooth and effective. One cannot or should not rather judge any message in isolation one should actually judge a message in totality that is why it actually provides you meta communication provides you a lot of thoughts.

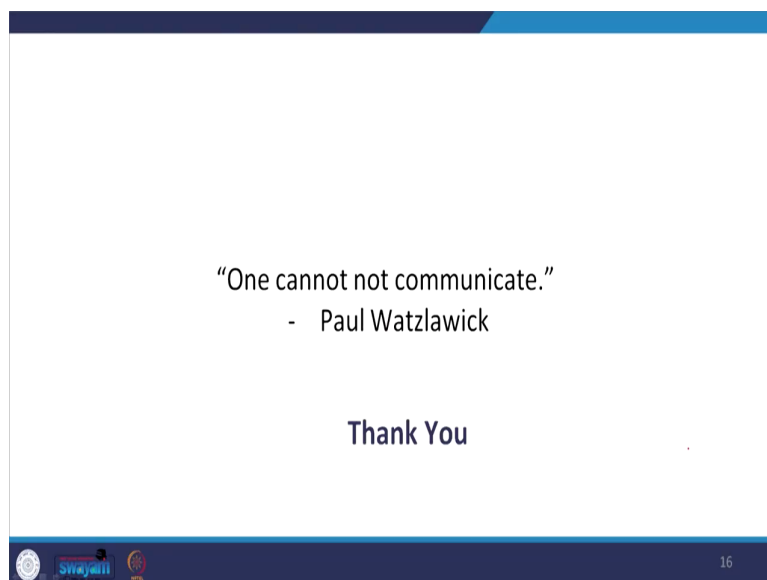
The proper combination of intended words and then certain cues that you leave is not it once upon a time handwriting used to be a marker of the person's mood temperament intension and whatsoever fine. But nowadays we are living in a different age where people do not write where people simply text and in texting also we come to know about their attitudes and beliefs with the help of this meta communication.

Interests, feelings and emotions could also be transferred well through effective meta-communication as we have already witnessed language and para language we have already talked about para language. Language and para- language they actually go hand in hand for establishing better communication. Hence, meta communication is very important my dear friend. So, we have already discussed today how whenever you are sending a message or whenever you are speaking in public speaking situations one has to be particularly aware of the sort of meta communicative signals as a speaker and not only as a speaker you can also

get the same from the receivers who also through their meta communication they provide you their feedback and tell you dear Mr. X why are you wasting your time too much, you have already exceeded the time limit.

The moment you find them glancing over their wristwatch, the moment you find them touching each other at the moment you find them raising their eyebrows and the moment you also find them looking at the speaker continuously without break, you need to understand the meta communicative message that they really want to get rid of now. So, meta-communication plays a very significant role in communication process and specially as a non- verbal meta communication has a lot to say.

**(Refer Slide Time: 32:43)**



So, before I come to wind up this talk, let me once again make a mention of a Paul Watzlawick, an Austrian American psychologist, who says, “ One cannot not communicate meaning” is that whether you write speak or you become idle, you remain silent every now and then you are communicating. You are never idle, you are always communicating through meta communication, thank you very much.

I hope you have been able to understand the importance of meta- communication and in the next lecture we shall once again take up something new. Thank you very much, I wish you all a good day.