

Body language in social interactions



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Discourse Analysis

This essay will cover how gaze, postures and gestures, speech accommodation, and conversation theories can make up social interactions. People communicate in different ways, sometimes during social interactions people send messages to the receiver without being aware of it, the theories cover what the phenomena is and what message it could be sending. This essay will apply these theories to the people talking on the Real Crime Rachel Nickell programme (Austin, 2009). This essay will also cover how these theories can be disputed and why they cannot be fully relied on to understand a person's thoughts and feelings when communicating (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014).

Gaze is believed to have an important role in non-verbal communication and can have many functions or send different messages to the receiver (Argyle, Ingham, Alkema, & McCallin, 1973). Argyle & Ingham (1986) found that gaze makes up 61% of a two-person social interaction and a gaze can last about 3 seconds (cited by Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). The timing and the amount of gaze can then be interpreted as different things to the receiver (Argyle, Ingham, Alkema, & McCallin, 1973).

One function of gaze is signalling interpersonal attitudes, this involves gazing to show dominance or affiliation. A subject sitting on the wrong side of a one way screen, so they cannot see the receiver, will still gaze in the direction of the receiver, this supports that gaze is used to emphasise their feelings towards that person. The use of monologues was used in this study to eliminate the use of gaze for synchronization, however the study does not

eliminate the use of gaze as signals for prosodic accompaniments (illustrators) of speech (Argyle, Ingham, Alkema, & McCallin, 1973).

This can be seen in the video by Paul Britton at 14. 59 (part 1), he stares at the interviewer which can be seen as visual dominance. At this point he is trying to defend himself so he is trying to get the power back in the conversation, however he is trying to make a point so the intense gaze could be seen as a prosodic accompaniment, especially as his speech slows down at this point.

However the use of gaze to send signs of dominance can be supported by Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Henson (1972), they found that when drivers were being stared at drove off more quickly at an intersection than those who were not being stared at. They linked this with primate behaviours, where the rapid depart was an avoidance technique. So we could suggest that Paul Britton was trying to get the interviewer to stop asking the attacking questions.

Although a large amount of staring can also be associated with trying to ingratiate yourself with someone or being persuasive (Klienke 1986 cited by Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). This can be related to Colin Stag in the video, he is trying to be persuasive and he is trying to bring himself into favour whilst he is trying to tell the interviewer his story.

Another function of gaze is synchronizing speech (Argyle, Ingham, Alkema, & McCallin, 1973), you gaze more often as a listener than you do as the speaker (Collier, 2014), therefore in order to stop the conversation or to gain the floor you take your gaze away (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). This was

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supported by a study that found that subjects gazed more during conversations than during monologues (Argyle, Ingham, Alkema, & McCallin, 1973).

This is part of the conversation theory which explains the automatic processes or rules that occur when engaging in conversation. These rules allow us to communicate effectively so people know whose turn it is to take over or when to end the conversation (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). Signals that indicate this include; coming to the end of a sentence; raising or lowering the intonation of the last word, for example at 5. 50 (Part 1) in the film when Andre raises the tone on the word “ time” and the interviewer takes over. Another signal is drawing out the last syllable, for example at 5. 21 (Part 1) Andre draws out the end of the word “ collapsed”. Next is leaving the sentence unfinished to invite the listener to continue, for example Andre attempts this at 7. 24 (Part 1) when he finishes his sentence with “ continue” but the interviewer does not take the floor he “ uhh” s instead and carries on. Other signals include body motions such as hand gestures, lifting head, sitting back, or previously mentioned gaze, so looking directly at the speaker, which can be seen with Andre at 7. 15 (Part 1) when the interviewer takes the floor (Argyle 1975 cited by Hogg & Vaughan, 2014) (Argyle M. , 1975).

However if these things were important for conversation synchrony then you would assume that over the phone, where you could not see the visual cues, you would get more interruptions, however Rutter and Stephenson (1977) found that there were fewer interruptions in a fifteen minute phone call than a face to face conversation (cited by Argyle M. , 1975).

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This could be because these visual cues could be interpreted in different ways, one of the reasons could be cultural difference. LaFrance & Mayo (1976) looked at the difference between African-American and White pairs in relation to their gaze patterns during conversations. They found that black pairs gazed less often whilst listening than white pairs did. However this study has its weaknesses because they can not eliminate whether it was race or social class that caused the difference in gaze. Also the fact that it was a field experiment could have had an effect because the setting was unfamiliar to the pair therefore this could have made them uncomfortable e. g. if they were sitting too close to each other it could have affected their gaze or more attention drawn to surroundings than the talker (LaFrance & Mayo, 1976).

Although from this study we can suggest that there could be confusion or awkwardness when there is a different cultured pair interacting as gaze whilst listening would mean different things and therefore interrupt the synchronisation of the conversation and could result in attempted suppressing signals from the talker. Other suppressing signals include keeping their voice the same pitch, head straight, faster speech or maintaining the same hand gesture even at the end of the sentence (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). An example of this is Paul Britton, his speech starts at 12. 23 and ends at 13. 00 (Part 1) during this time his speech is fast, his head is straight, he doesn't move his hands and when he is thinking he looks away so the interviewer doesn't take this as he is finished and to take the floor.

Another important part of conversation is back-channel communication so the talker knows the receiver is still listening without necessarily seeing them.

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Such signals include; utterances such as the “ mmm-hmm” Colin Stag received on the phone at 1. 08 (part 2); and nodding, as Andre showed at 7. 16 (Part 1) (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014).

Although nodding can be seen as an illustrator or an emblem in the postures and gestures theory. Kinesics, developed by Birdwhistell (1970), are a series of gestures and body movements that create body communication (cited by Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). In Andre’s example of nodding mentioned above it was an illustrator because the gesture accompanied spoken language (Argyle M. , 1975) (Archer, 1997).

Another example of an illustrator Andre used was at 9. 02 (Part 1) when he uses his hands to assist in describing a situation with his child, his fingers are together for pointing or directing. When Paul Britton was trying to defend himself when talking about the entrapment (0. 18 Part 2) he points and uses a pushing motion help illustrate his defensive point, although the gesture is very similar to Andre’s it could be seen as more dominant. Henley & Harmon (1985) suggested that pointing and invading personal space could be seen as gestures that give dominant impressions. However it is important to note that this work was done in comparing the dominance between genders and both Paul Britton and the interviewer are male in this example, also the research can suggest a feminist bias.

But from this we can gather that just an illustrator alone can not send the correct message it may need syntax context aswell. However emblems can give messages on their own, for example when Colin Stag leaves the police station in the film he puts his fingers up to swear (13. 49 Part 1) . However

emblems can be culturally different for example the U. S. President Bush offended British commonwealth because he used the fingers up emblems they take as swearing, when he had it mistaken for Churchill's famous " V" victory gesture (Archer, 1997).

From these theories we can suggest that postures and gestures are a learnt behaviour abit like language, like language it is also instinctive to learn, as there is evidence to suggest that kinestics have been used before spoken language evolved. It can also suggest that any research into postures and gestures can be flawed or restricted unless they are cross examined by class, culture and gender (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014).

However differences in speech styles by language, culture or class can be accounted for in speech accomodation theory. It is used to either ensure the talker and receiver understand eachother or to promote a specific impression to obtain approval.

Types of speech accomodation are; speech convergence, this is when the talker shifts their speech style towards the other person. For example when Andre is recalling how he got his son to describe the killer he used simple terms like ' thin-man" and " fat-man", so he lowered his speech style so the child would understand. In addition bilateral speech convergence occurs in the same pattern when two friends are talking, but the lower stauts speaker will also shift their speech upwards to gain approval and liking (Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1973) (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). This can be supported by Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis (1973) who found that accomodating French-Canadian speakers were percieved as more considerate and more prepared to gain

mutual understanding by English-Canadian speakers than non accommodating speakers.

The other type is speech divergence, this is when the talker shifts their speech style away from the other person, this can happen to achieve psycholinguistic distinctiveness in order to differentiate the status of the ingroup from the outgroup (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). This can be supported by Bourhis & Giles (1977) who found that whilst there was a language revival Welsh people accentuated their accent in the presence of English speakers, so there was a clear divide between the in and out group.

However Thankerar, Giles and Cheshire (1982) suggested that changes in speech styles are due to conformity to stereotypical norms. For example the Welsh accentuated their accents to play up to their stereotype. Although it does not better explain Andre's example in the film, it makes more sense he converged his speech for the child to understand rather than it was a stereotypical norm to do so (cited by Hogg & Vaughan, 2014).

In conclusion its clear that all these theories have some kind of connection and together they can start to paint a picture of what kind of messages the people on the film are sending (Austin, 2009). However because the signals people send can be taken ambiguously it can make research difficult and it is important to note that the research here is based on analysing and observing people, so researchers can choose what they see and be blind to other variables (Birdwhistell, 2010). Also it seems alot more research could be done into the differences between social class, culture and gender to gather a clear understanding (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014).

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