

Nonverbal Communication

Introduction

- Nonverbal communication – conveying information without words
 - can be a variety of things, i.e. eye contact, facial expressions, gesture, etc
 - can be conscious or subconscious
- Commonly referred to as “body language” (ermmm actually an incorrect term because it is not only our body)

Nonverbal Channels

- 66% of meaning is communicated through things other than words
 - can change depending on context; i.e. we know politicians carefully craft words so we look at things they can't control as well
- Nonverbals tend to become more important when the verbal channel is in conflict
 - i.e. someone very angrily shouting they're happy, sarcasm, teasing
 - Sometimes we let our nonverbals talk for us because it is the norm to be non-assertive and polite, i.e. I'm bored, you smell
 - In a social context, we tend to focus more on nonverbals
- Children focus on words more than nonverbals because they are still developing
 - This is why conflicting channels tend to fly over their head (i.e. sarcasm, teasing, etc)

Gestures

- Emblems – communicating meaning taking the place of words or accompanying them
 - i.e. pointing, touching, some hand gestures

- meaning can also be more complex, i.e. prayer, thumbs up, facepalm, shrug
- Illustrators – things that add meaning to our words, but do not really have any meaning itself
 - i.e. hand purse, air grasp, finger stab
 - more subconscious than emblems
 - some indicators it's also used to help organize thoughts, i.e. gestures even while talking on the phone
 - bigger in some cultures than others

Facial Expressions

- A major function of our face is communicating emotion
 - humans are really good at picking up on facial expression
 - almost too good at it; we don't always want to have our emotions broadcast
- Paul Ekman (1971) proposes 6 basic emotions; happiness, surprise, sadness, fear, disgust and anger, where other emotions are a mix of these
 - Paul Ekman (1990) also proposed some more emotions, such as amusement, contempt, contentment, embarrassment, excitement, guilt, pride, relief, satisfaction, sensory pleasure and shame
- Happiness – stereotypically about the smile, but also when the eyes also smile
 - when we smile, we try to communicate that we are happy
 - fake smiles only use the mouth, where as real smiles use a lot more muscles in the face
 - a good indicator for a real smile is to look at the eyes
- Sadness – stereotypically about the frown, but not really a true indicator; actually more communicated in the eyes
 - a frown doesn't actually really tell us anything (could be resting face) so it is not really a true indicator of sadness
 - hardest to spot (left out of our evolutionary lineage?)
 - kids trying to communicate sadness really exaggerate their features, like pouting lips and other stuff
- Disgust – scrub your nose, button your mouth up, etc

- Surprise – eyebrows wide open and high, eyes wide open, mouth agape
 - regarding evolution, it helps to prepare for flight or fight; big breath, eyes wide open, alert
- Fear – a little like surprise but not as exaggerated
- Anger – snarling mouth, death stare eyes
 - death stare – actually subtle, narrowed eyes but we are very good at picking up on this

Theories of Facial Expression

- Darwin (1872) argues that because it's an evolutionary thing, our brains are hardwired to work with nonverbal communication
 - Doesn't explain everything; like the point of smiling
 - Some pretty powerful evidence regarding this theory is that babies smile even if they're born blind and deaf
 - Babies are pretty good at doing and learning emotions, generally full spectrum within 6 months

Cross-cultural Differences

- Paul Ekman's Neurocultural theory argues some cultures inhibit what you would naturally do
 - i.e. Japan is more likely to display less disgust or anger
- Emblems, Eye contact, Body orientation, Minimal encouragers (i.e. yeah, mhm, wow) are different across places
 - new yorkers are loud

Deception and Nonverbal Behaviors

- Can you tell from nonverbals whether people are lying?
 - Idea is that we can control our verbals, but not as much with our nonverbals
 - The rate of speech and number of disturbances increases when making up information (depends on the lie being told)

- Voice pitch seems to be the only reliable indicator of deception; tends to go up when people are lying
 - Multiple theories on differences when lying; sometimes contradictory
- Generally, people are no better than chance at detecting deception; around 50/50
 - even for jobs like police officers and customs officials
 - exception is secret service agents, some members of the intelligence community that have been specially trained
- People have a stereotype about what it means to look deceptive (body movement, speech disturbances, gaze aversion, speech latencies) but these are just signs of being nervous (doesn't mean they're lying!)
 - People are actually largely focus on the inaccurate part of the stereotype and ignore the accurate parts
 - Only voice pitch is a reliable indicator; tends to go up when lying
- However, we are able to accurately detect deception when it involves someone close and we are alerted to it
 - watch "Interview with Bill von Hippel on deception" for good info
 - Detecting deception is a social thing, not an individuals ability; something that comes from being in a social group and living in a social context