

Invited Talk

What's Unique About Dialogue? Hand gestures, figurative language, facial displays, and direct quotation

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Face-to-face dialogue is the basic site of language use. Our group's program of research focuses on unique features of face-to-face dialogue, especially the ways in which participants collaborate moment-by-moment (e.g. Bavelas et al., 1995; Bavelas and Chovil, 1997; Bavelas et al., 2000, 2002). Current experiments are showing that the availability of collaborative processes in dialogue significantly affects whether speakers use the modality that Peirce called iconic and Clark and Gerrig (1990) called demonstration. Demonstrations resemble their referents, creating an image for the addressee; for example, hand gestures, facial displays, direct quotation, and figurative language are all demonstrations. We have shown the effect of dialogue on these four kinds of demonstration by using an experimental design with three conditions: a face-to-face dialogue; a dialogue on the telephone; and a monologue to a tape recorder. The first experiment on gesture (Bavelas et al., 2008) showed an independent effect of dialogue, over and above the effect of visibility. The rate of hand gestures was higher in dialogue than in monologue, that is, both the face-to-face and the telephone dialogues had significantly higher rates of gesturing than for the same task in a monologue. Figurative language also showed a dialogue effect; for example, the rate of figurative language was significantly higher in a telephone dialogue than a monologue to a tape recorder. We have subsequently replicated these two effects in a different data set. The second experiment with the same design examined the effects of dialogue on conversational facial displays and direct quotations. Again, the dialogues produced significantly higher rates of these forms of demonstration, while the monologues consisted almost entirely of conventional verbal description. We propose that monologue suppresses both verbal and nonverbal forms of demonstration because demonstrations require an addressee. Current research is investigating which particular feature of speaker-addressee interaction is essential to the use of demonstrations.

References

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