

Conducting interaction

Patterns of behavior
in focused encounters

ADAM KENDON



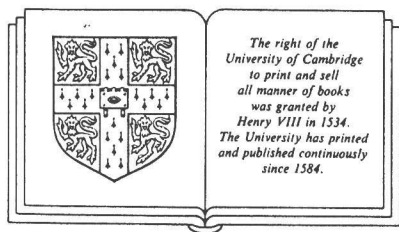
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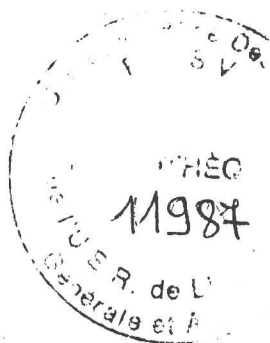


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This book makes available five classic studies of the organization of behavior in face-to-face interaction. It includes Adam Kendon's well-known study of gaze direction in interaction, his study of greetings, of the interactional functions of facial expression and of the spatial organization of naturally occurring interaction, as recorded by means of film or videotape. They represent some of the best work undertaken within the "natural history" tradition of interaction studies, as originally formulated in the work of Bateson, Birdwhistell and Goffman. Chapter 2, written especially for this publication, provides an historical and theoretical discussion of this tradition, and a final chapter takes up the theme of the organization of attention in interaction. The introduction provides details of the circumstances of how each paper came to be written. Each of the papers reprinted is also accompanied by a short postscript, placing the work in the context of more recent research.

Several of the papers presented in this volume, although widely referred to, have long been difficult to obtain. Their re-publication will be warmly welcomed by all students and teachers who are concerned with face-to-face interaction.

Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics

General Editor: John J. Gumperz

Conducting interaction

Patterns of behavior in focused encounters

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Preface

The papers reprinted in this book may be seen as responses to Erving Goffman's (1967, pp. 1-3) call for a study of the "ultimate behavioral materials" of interaction. These papers deal, in some detail, with what he referred to as the "small behaviors" of interaction. That is, they deal with "the glances, gestures, positionings and verbal statements" that constitute the stuff of face-to-face encounters. Goffman believed that their study would make possible both a description of "the natural units of interaction" and an understanding of the "normative order prevailing within and between these units." He argued that, in order to understand how people routinely achieve order in their interactions with one another, "we need to identify the countless patterns and natural sequences of behavior occurring whenever persons come into one another's immediate presence." It is just this that is attempted by five of the papers republished here (Chapters 3-7).

For the theoretical and methodological outlook that governs these studies I am indebted not only to Erving Goffman, but, as well, to Gregory Bateson, Ray Birdwhistell and Albert Scheflen. Bateson, Birdwhistell and Scheflen showed the value of a "natural history" approach to the study of interaction and they showed what may be derived from the detailed examination of specimens of it, as these may be collected by means of film or video-tape. The five studies reprinted here all follow this method, which is sometimes referred to as "Context Analysis." In Chapter 2, I discuss the antecedents of this approach, and how they combined to form this method of investigation. I discuss the place of Context Analysis in the study of social interaction, as this has developed in social science generally, and I show the nature of the influence of such diverse lines of work as interpersonal psychiatry, information theory,

cybernetics, and structural (descriptive) linguistics, as these were brought to bear in the development of the method.

Finally, Chapter 8 considers some of the implications of findings reported by Context Analysis and seeks to provide some behavioral grounding for the theoretical work on "framing" that was developed first by Bateson and, later, by Goffman. It is a contribution to a theory of how participants in focused interaction organize and regulate the coordination of each other's attention.

Chapters 3–8 first appeared in print between 1967 and 1985. Original place of publication is acknowledged in a footnote, in each case. Five of these papers (Chapters 3–7) were also published together in 1977 by the Peter De Ridder Press and the Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies, Indiana University, in a collection entitled *Studies in the Behavior of Social Interaction*. Except for Chapter 5, where I have rewritten a small section which had become completely outdated, the papers are reprinted here without alteration. However, where appropriate, I have added a short postscript to indicate what work related to the topic of the paper has been published since it originally appeared. The Introduction (Chapter 1) is a rewritten version of the Introduction to the 1977 collection. Chapter 2, although it draws upon a previously published paper (Kendon 1982), has been specially written for the present volume and includes a good deal of new material. Frederick Erickson read these two newly written chapters in draft form and his detailed suggestions, where I have tried to follow them, have led to significant improvements.

In the 1977 collection I acknowledged a special debt to Albert Scheflen. I count myself especially fortunate in having been able to work closely with him over a number of years. The work of Chapters 4–7 was directly facilitated by him, both intellectually and administratively. I should like to repeat, once again, my expression of indebtedness to Andrew Ferber for his collaboration with me on the work of Chapter 6 and for allowing me to make free use of it and of the materials on which it is based. Robert McMillan and Robert Deutsch contributed significantly to the work of Chapter 7. Discussions with Matthew Ciolek were also important for this Chapter and he helped me with the illustrations. William Condon gave me a very thorough introduction to his work and methods. Chapter 4 was a direct outcome of my work with him. Dr. Henry Brosin was director of Western Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute in Pittsburgh at the time I did this work and I remember with much

appreciation his kindness in facilitating my stay at that institution. At Oxford, Dr. E. R. W. F. Crossman first suggested that I should work with films of social interaction. My early attempts at film analysis were done in collaboration with Professor J. Ex of Nijmegen. I still remember how valuable the discussions were which we had. Michael Argyle has taken an interest in my work over the years and has always been encouraging. He remains a good friend.

Finally, I would like to thank Professor John Gumperz for suggesting that this collection of papers should be reissued in his Interactional Sociolinguistics Series.

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Introduction

Occasions of interaction are, most of the time, ordered affairs. When two people greet one another, when several sustain a conversation, when a committee meets to conduct its business, when people pass one another on the street, most of the time these are ordered occasions in the sense that they “come off” in an unnoticed fashion. We may remember being pleased or disturbed on meeting our acquaintance, we may recall the value of what passed in the conversation, of the business accomplished in the committee meeting, but such memories generally do not include details about how these events were organized. We tend not to recall the spatial organization of the event, how we decided when it was our turn to speak, how we organized ourselves when we did so and how the others showed that they did, or did not understand what we said. Yet, to engage in a greeting, to sustain a conversation, to pass another on the street, requires of us both an ability to recognize the nature of a given interaction situation and to receive and interpret information from others in the light of this, and to produce acts of maneuver, orientation and utterance that will at once further our private purposes and serve so as not to disrupt, distract or otherwise render the situation socially impossible. Participants in such events must be able to act “appropriately”: in greeting, for instance, we rarely hesitate about just what should be said or done, in passing another on the street we each keep going, confident in the assumption that the other will take no more interest in us than we in them and confident that the other sees us as well as we see them, and so can steer by us smoothly.

Most of the time this orderliness of face-to-face interaction is unquestioned. Occasionally, however, we experience encounters in which something goes wrong, in which, somehow, what went forward was not “appropriate”: a *faux pas* was committed or a “brick” was

dropped. Many people also have acquaintances who are somehow "awkward," or who, worse than this, seem somehow routinely unable to cope with encounters and always cause extensive interactional trouble. Such instances of awkwardness, or our acquaintance with interactional troublemakers, make us realize, from time to time, that routine interactional smoothness is not something that comes automatically. Rather, it appears as something people are more or less capable of. Further, as anyone who has reared children knows, it is something that must be learned. If we reflect on such realizations we may be led to raise questions about what people need to know to interact smoothly in everyday life, what the sources of information are that they must rely upon for this, and how such information is interpreted.

These kinds of questions have come in for an increasing amount of systematic investigation in recent years. In psychiatry there have been attempts to reformulate issues of psychopathology in terms of defective abilities in interaction, there has been a widespread development of concern with the management of interpersonal relations, and there have been more technical concerns with procedures of interviewing, and the like. The issue of cultural differences in interaction practices has also been raised, because of the difficulties this can create when persons of different cultural backgrounds must do business with one another. In social and cultural anthropology there have been attempts to formulate the concept of "culture" in interactional terms. In sociology there is the viewpoint of "interactionism" in which individual personality and social structure are regarded as the product of interaction processes. The more recent ethnomethodological critique, in raising fundamental issues about the nature of "social facts" and how they are constructed, has also led to an interest in examining, in detail, the interactive processes through which such "facts" are created and sustained. The most conspicuous outgrowth of this is Conversation Analysis, which seeks to describe the detailed orderliness with which people relate their utterances to one another in conversation. In linguistics, there have been extensive developments, in sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication and discourse analysis, for example, in which language is looked at in terms of how it is used in interaction. Further, there are students of language who argue that, if language is an instrument of interaction, its structure will be shaped as much by the requirements of its use, as it is by extremely general, abstract, "pre-wired" grammatical constraints. In addition, some linguists realize, along with others with related

interests, that if spoken language is to be accounted for, this must be in terms of its relationships with other modes of communication. The communicative functions so often assigned to language can be, and often are, accomplished by non-linguistic means and the reverse is also the case. The embeddedness of spoken utterance in the whole configuration of behavior in interaction demands examination, therefore (see, for example, Poyatos 1983, Arndt and Janney 1987).

To an increasing degree, thus, investigations into interaction are raising the question as to how people accomplish it. More and more, issues such as how interactions between people get started in the first place, how the status of interactional participant is entered into or relinquished, what it takes for someone in an encounter to know what relevance the actions of others have for him and what is required, on his part, to ensure that his actions have relevance for others, are coming to be focused upon. It is this sort of study of interaction that concerns us in this book. All of the papers here reprinted are inquiries into the details of just what interactants actually do when they interact with one another: where they look, when they speak or remain silent, how they move, how they manage their faces, how they orient to one another and how they position themselves spatially. It is out of such concrete observable behaviors that particular events of interaction are fashioned, and if we are to come to an understanding of how people manage to sustain encounters with one another we must understand the organization and import of everything that they do.

The way this approach to the study of interaction developed is discussed in some detail in Chapter 2. I myself first came to it through a reading of two of Goffman's earliest papers, "On face-work" (Goffman 1955) and "Alienation from interaction" (Goffman 1957), while an Advanced Student at the Institute (now Department) of Experimental Psychology at Oxford. In these papers Goffman showed how occasions of interaction could be treated as such, and he pointed out that participants enter into elaborate systems of cooperation with one another, effectively allowing their behavior to be governed by the requirements of the interaction system they had entered into. He suggested how the behavior of people in interaction could be looked upon from the point of view of how it functions in the interaction system, rather than from the point of view of how it furthers or reveals an individual's current intentions, or gives expressions to aspects of his particular personality.

The analysis offered in these papers suggested to me that the individ-

ual, when engaged in face-to-face interaction, could be regarded as if engaged in a skilled performance, analogous to the way in which the driver of a car or the pilot of an airplane is engaged in a skilled performance, in which the operator must continuously organize his behavior so that it is patterned to meet the complex demands of the situation and still keep the car on the road or the plane on course. In a face-to-face encounter the participant is faced with the necessity of sustaining a complex organization of his behavior which can meet the fluctuations of the situation and maintain him as a fully incorporated participant. He has to mount a performance which can match the standards set by the jointly negotiated working consensus of the encounter. This will include the maintenance of an appropriate appearance and manner, a proper handling of moment-to-moment details such as the negotiation of the turn-taking rules operative in the situation, and an appropriate management of the content of his talk, so that it is fitted properly to the current topic jointly being sustained. An interactant, thus, must constantly be attentive to the relationship between his performance and that of others in the encounter and adjust his performance in relation to this. An occasion of interaction such as a conversation, thus, may be looked upon as an occasion in which the participants enter into a complex system of relationships which nonetheless may be understood in terms of general principles which are discoverable and generally applicable, even though the course of any specific encounter is unique (cf. Kendon 1963, Argyle and Kendon 1967).

In my initial attempts to analyze the interrelatedness of behavior in interaction, I confined myself to working with the temporal patterning of utterances, as this may be measured by means of Chapple's technique of interaction chronography (Chapple 1940, Kendon 1963). However, in 1963, in response to suggestions made by E. R. W. F. Crossman at Oxford, who had done considerable work in the analysis of manual skills, I began to look at films of two-person conversations. It became apparent at once that there were complex patterns and regularities of behavior, and that the interactants were guiding their behavior, each in relation to the other, in respect to many of them at once.

Soon after beginning work on films of conversations I became aware of the work of Scheflen (1963, 1964) and Birdwhistell (1952 and subsequent unpublished papers). The "behavior systems" approach (Scheflen 1973) and its methodological corollary, Context Analysis (Scheflen 1964, 1966, 1973, Bär 1974), that these workers were devel-

oping, which also emphasized the detailed analysis of filmed specimens of interaction (cf. Kendon 1979), clearly provided an appropriate framework for the line of inquiry I was following.

The first of the studies reprinted (Chapter 3) is concerned with the way in which participants in interaction pattern their direction of gaze in relation to one another and in relation to their utterances. It deals with a number of different questions, but a main theme addressed in the paper is the way in which gaze direction in conversation can serve at once, for the actor, as a way in which he manages what aspect of the interaction situation he receives information from but, at the same time, it serves to provide information to coparticipants about how his attention is being distributed. The suggestion is made that how the display of the direction of visual attention is coordinated in relation to who is speaking in a conversation may play an important role in the process by which utterance coordination in conversation is achieved.

This study, completed in 1965 but not published until 1967, and which was done while I was at Oxford, was directly inspired by the approach to the analysis of perceptuo-motor skills that had been worked out at Cambridge in the preceding decades by F. C. Bartlett (1947), Kenneth Craik (1947, 1948), Russell Davis (1948) and A. T. Welford (see Welford 1968 for an overview of this work). The idea that gaze direction in interaction should be analyzed derived directly from the idea that the understanding of the relationship between sensory input and motor output is crucial for the understanding of the organization of perceptuo-motor skills. The way in which a skilled operator patterns his targets of visual attention as he carries out his task is thus an important datum (Crossman 1956). If engaging in conversation is looked upon as a skilled task, then the targets of a conversationalist's visual attention could be relevant in the same way. During the same period, also at Oxford, Michael Argyle undertook his own first studies on gaze direction in interaction (Argyle and Dean 1965) while Ralph Exline of the University of Delaware, perhaps the first student of social interaction to pay attention to gaze (Exline 1961), was a visiting scholar at Oxford. The other pioneer of gaze-direction studies who should be mentioned is Gerhard Nielsen (1964), some of whose findings on looking in relation to utterances in conversation anticipated those reported later in the study we have here reprinted.

Films or video-tapes of occasions of face-to-face interaction permit the behavior of the participants to be inspected repeatedly so that it may

be analyzed in great detail. When one first begins to undertake such detailed inspection one cannot help but be struck by the intricacy with which participants' behavior is coordinated. It becomes apparent that participants come to sustain systems of relationship which integrate many different aspects of their behavior. A particularly striking demonstration of this was provided by William Condon (Condon and Ogston 1966, 1967) who undertook extremely detailed studies of the way in which movement is organized in relation to speech, not only within a single individual, but also between individuals. Condon has shown that conversationalists can become synchronous in their movements, entering into a continuous and jointly sustained "dance."

During 1966-7, through the good offices of Albert Scheflen and Henry Brosin, I was given the opportunity to work with Condon in Pittsburgh. I am very much indebted to him for the extensive introduction to his work that he gave me. Chapter 4 is a direct consequence of this. It consists of a detailed examination of the relationship between the speech and bodily movements of a speaker-listener pair (termed in the paper here reprinted an "interactional axis," though a better term for it would be an "utterance exchange axis," since it is specifically around the task of exchanging spoken utterances that the behavior observed is organized) within the context of an ongoing focused gathering containing eleven participants. The paper demonstrates how, as an utterance exchange axis is established in this situation, the two individuals involved come to move in synchrony with one another, and it suggests that the synchronization of movement that obtains plays an important part in the maintenance of coordinated attention. The phenomenon of behavioral synchrony between participants in interaction and its functioning is discussed in several other papers in this volume also. In Chapter 6, where greeting interactions are discussed, the question of how a greeting is initiated is investigated. An example is described of a synchronous relationship being established between two individuals as a prelude to their becoming mutually engaged in a salutational exchange. Synchronous relationships in spatial-orientational maneuvering are also referred to in Chapter 7, where examples are described that suggest that it is through entering into a shared rhythm of movement that new participants become incorporated as full-fledged participants in ongoing interactional events. Its significance in the process of attentional and affective attunement is also discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 5 is a reprint of a paper in which an attempt is made to

analyze the organization of what is here called a “kissing round.” It is an analysis of a film of a young couple sitting together on a bench in a large urban park. An important feature of this paper is its treatment of the behavior of the face from an interactional point of view, rather than regarding it solely from the point of view of how it displays emotions, the most usual way in which the face is considered (Fridland, Ekman and Oster 1987 is the latest comprehensive review of work from this viewpoint). As is clearly illustrated in the example analyzed in this chapter, the face has an important role to play in regulating the interaction. Thus in this paper it appears that the variable behavior observed in the face of the female is coordinated in a highly ordered manner with the approaches and withdrawals of her male partner. This coordination is such as to suggest that her face is here functioning as a regulator of his behavior. The implication is, thus, that the various smiles, frowns, “surprise” expressions and so on, that occur in this interaction are not significant only as symptoms of feeling but also as displays of interactive intent and, as such, serve as forewarnings, and hence as regulators of the other’s behavior.

Another theme of Chapter 5 is the way in which an established interactional routine is changed. The kissing round treated in this paper, like the interactional axis treated in the one that precedes it, is a routine of interaction that takes place within the frame of a more inclusive system of relationship. The interactional axis is but one of many such episodes that occur within the frame of a more inclusive episode, the discussion session. Similarly, the “kissing round” is an episode within the episode of “sitting together,” which in turn is an episode within the “afternoon walk” which the couple in question were engaged in. One problem that arises is that of how an ongoing routine of interaction is terminated while at the same time the more inclusive interactional frame which contains it is preserved. In the kissing round analyzed in Chapter 5 several phases could be distinguished in terms of who was taking the initiative in approaching the other. A question that is raised and discussed is how one phase of the interaction within the round is changed to another phase, without the more inclusive frame, that of the “kissing round” as a whole, being altered. Such “contained” routine changes must be accomplished jointly, and they involve devices whereby each participant is forewarned of the other’s next mode of interaction before the present mode is actually changed.

This question of how participants inform one another of the context