

FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION:

Research, Methods, and Theory

STARKEY DUNCAN, Jr.

DONALD W. FISKE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



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Preface

The understanding of face-to-face interaction is central to the conceptualization and study of human social conduct. A major focus of the book is on how to do research on this topic. How can that research be sound and replicable? To learn about interactions, what is the necessary level of analysis? What methods of data collection and analysis make most effective use of information available in interactions?

A second major focus is on a model for conceptualizing face-to-face interaction. This model draws its components from several social sciences, especially linguistics. Its basic idea is that face-to-face interaction can be construed as having a definite organization or structure, just as language is understood in terms of its grammar. Within that organization, the participant has options that he can exercise, including the option of violating aspects of the organization. A pattern of option choices may be described in terms of the participant's strategy within observed interactions. Some tasks for research are discovery of the elements of this organization and development of adequate ways of describing the organization as a whole.

Much has been written for professional and popular audiences about interpersonal interactions and about specific actions that occur in these encounters. These have included both insightful commentaries based upon general observations and investigations of single behaviors. What this book proposes is a general conceptual framework for guiding empirical investigation. In particular, emphasis is placed on the simultaneous study of a number of acts, searching for the locus of each act within a context of other acts in contiguity to it.

This book was written for researchers and students concerned with face-to-face interactions. It is more a treatise than a textbook aimed at coverage of the large body of prior work on that topic. We present here a definite viewpoint and show how that view can be implemented. As such, this volume may be useful as supplementary reading for courses on nonverbal communication and a variety of social science courses that deal with face-to-face interaction.

In Part I we consider the substantive area and the research strategies appropriate for it. The processes of classifying behavior and of collecting data on face-to-face interactions are examined. What designs can be used for research on that topic? What kinds of research procedures are satisfactory and what kinds are unsatisfactory in this area?

In Part II we describe a large correlational study in which numerous scores for the occurrences of acts in a whole interaction are analyzed. It reports correlations of such scores with scores for other acts of the same participant, with scores for acts of the partner, and with scores from many self-descriptive variables.

In Part III we report a study exploring elements of the organization of several interactions used in Part II and of other interactions. The organization is studied in terms of action sequences. Particular attention is given to actions associated with the exchange of speaking turns and with speaker-auditor interaction during speaking turns.

In Part IV we propose the general conceptual model and outline how that model can be used to guide research.

The research reported here could not have been done without the contributions of labor, ideas, and constructive advice of a number of individuals, and without indispensable financial support. We wish to express our appreciation and indebtedness to those individuals and institutions from whom we have received so much.

Little of the reported research could have been carried out without basic financial support. Initial transcription and analysis of videotapes were made possible by Grants MH-16,210 and MH-17,756 from the National Institute of Mental Health to Duncan. Continuing research support was provided by the Division of Social Sciences of the National Science Foundation Grants GS-3033 and GS-3033A1 to Duncan, Grants GS-3127 and GS-3127A1 to Fiske, and SOC74-24084 to Duncan and Fiske. A pilot study for the work described in Part II was supported by a grant from the Social Science Research Committee, Division of Social Sciences, University of Chicago.

One of the pleasures of doing research in a university setting is the presence of students who give generously of their time, energies, and ideas. The following students gave these, as well as their unique contributions as individuals, to the research team: Lawrence Brunner, Jeanine Carlson, Mark Cary, Alan Fogel, Barbara Kanki, Diane Martin, Ray O'Cain, Thomas Rossen, Thomas Shanks, Cathy Stepanek, and Andrew Szasz. At a turning point

in the project, Dr. Anna Katz Lieblich brought a fresh perspective and special research skills as a research associate in the Department of Behavioral Sciences. As indicated in the text, some of the results reported are derived from the research of Susan Beekman and George Niederehe.

Too easily overlooked are the subjects in our studies. For modest or sometimes no financial compensation their good-faith willingness to engage in interactions and to be videotaped provided the basic stuff of our research. We hope that they will judge their cooperation to have led to some constructive results.

This project could not have been undertaken and pursued without the continuing tangible and intangible support of the University of Chicago. This support was most directly provided by David McNeill, Chairman of the Committee on Cognition and Communication; Norman Bradburn, Chairman of the Department of Behavioral Sciences; M. Brewster Smith, Chairman of the Department of Psychology; and Robert McC. Adams and William H. Kruskal, Deans of the Division of Social Sciences.

Essential to any set of developing ideas and methods are the advice and encouragement of one's colleagues in both the visible and "invisible" colleges. Taking the time to furnish thoughtful critiques and suggestions on written products of this project were Allen Dittmann, Paul Ekman, Ralph Exline, Siegfried Frey, Erving Goffman, Adam Kendon, Robert Krauss, Dell Hymes, Norman Markel, Norman A. McQuown, Howard Rosenfeld, Robert Rosenthal, and Emmanuel Schegloff. These scholars have done their best to keep this research ship on a reasonable course and cannot be faulted for any misdirections detectable in the pages to follow.

We wish to mention in this connection the comments of reviewers of research-grant proposals and journal articles. While they cannot be properly acknowledged (their identities being a more or less well-kept secret), their remarks were often constructive and insightful, making possible a substantially improved report.

To say that Janet Records prepared the manuscript cannot do justice to her efforts, executive ability, and tact. She maintained the organization of manuscript preparation, typed with astonishing speed and accuracy, and gently indicated ragged sections and deteriorating usage—all with unfailing equanimity. Thank you, Janet. Barbara Page Fiske read the manuscript and made many valuable suggestions about style and exposition.

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Part I

FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION:
THE RESEARCH AREA
AND BASIC ISSUES

**FACE-TO-FACE
INTERACTION:**

RESEARCH, METHODS, AND THEORY

Part **I**

FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION:
THE RESEARCH AREA
AND SOME BASIC ISSUES

1

Introduction

Let us consider the everyday world of face-to-face encounters. Common-place activities in these encounters—greeting, discussing, joking, bargaining, directing, commiserating, getting acquainted, promising, rebuffing, and the like—make up the fabric of an individual's social world. In this monograph we shall be concerned with research on face-to-face interaction. In the course of our discussion we shall propose a research model for identifying various types of regularities in face-to-face interaction, and we shall outline a conceptual framework for interpreting these regularities.

We intend our proposals to be general with respect to type and location of interaction. Any occasion of face-to-face interaction will be considered potentially fair game for inquiry under our research model: conversations, family meals, elevator rides, athletic events, casual greetings in passing, and religious rituals. Nor need the location of the interaction be restricted. The location may be public, such as sidewalks, grocery stores, and airports; semipublic, such as offices, courtrooms, and classrooms; or private, such as homes.

We take for granted the centrality of face-to-face interaction for individuals and society. In Goldschmidt's (1972) words, "Social interaction is the very stuff of human life. The individuals of all societies move through life in terms of a continuous series of social interactions. It is in the context of such social encounters that the individual expresses the significant elements of his culture, whether they are matters of economics, social status, personal values, self-image, or religious belief [p. 59]." It is in this sense that we interpret Sapir's (1968) statement that society "is being reanimated or creatively affirmed from day to day by particular acts of a communicative nature which obtain among individuals participating in it [p. 104]."

It will not be surprising, then, that we find ourselves in agreement with Wilson (1972) when, in his review of Hinde's (1972) *Non-verbal communication*, he evaluates the general study of human communication as "what

surely must be one of the most important of all emerging scholarly fields [p. 627].”

By focusing on the process of face-to-face interaction itself, we and others working in this area are intellectually indebted, as Kendon (1975) points out, to Georg Simmel, who placed great emphasis on forms of interaction (Levine, 1971), and to George Herbert Mead (1934), who urged the pursuit of social psychology by “starting out with a given social whole of complex group activity, into which we analyze (as elements) the behavior of each of the separate individuals composing it [p. 7].”

FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

As Goffman (1971) and others have pointed out, it is difficult to choose a fully satisfactory term for this emergent area of inquiry. Among the many investigators concerned with various aspects of social conduct there is as yet no consensus on a name for the field itself. Although Goffman speaks of “face-to-face interaction,” he chooses “public life” to designate the field he considers in his monograph, *Relations in public*. Others working with the same general sort of phenomena have used such terms as “context analysis” (Schefflen, 1966); “clinical sociology” (Lennard & Bernstein, 1969); “non-verbal communication” (e.g., Duncan, 1969; Hinde, 1972; Mehrabian, 1972); “ethnography of encounters” (Goldschmidt, 1972); “human ethology” or some similar term (e.g., Arensberg, 1972; Blurton Jones, 1972; McGrew, 1972; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1970); and “human linguistics” (Yngve, 1975).

Thus we posit our term, less from a conviction of its ultimate desirability than from the necessity of using some single term amid the confusing array of alternatives. More important is the special approach to describing face-to-face interaction, considered in the next section.

“SOCIAL ACTION”

We shall be selective in the manner in which these face-to-face interactions will be described. Acknowledging that the literature abounds with a seemingly endless variety of ways of describing interaction—from physiological indices to models of existential conflict—we approach the study of face-to-face interaction through data based on the relatively specific, immediately observable behaviors, so numerous and varied, of which the larger activities are composed. We refer here to such things as head nods, smiles, hand gestures, leg crossings, eyebrow raisings, voice lowerings, throat clearings, completions of syntactic elements, head scratches, and posture shifts. When hu-

man conduct is characterized on this relatively low level of abstraction, judges use only a minimum of inferring in their ratings, and they need not summarize their judgments over time. These points and others are considered in greater detail in Chapter 2.

It is the sort of occurrence mentioned above that Goffman (1971, p.1) has termed the "small behaviors." Our term for them will be acts or actions, a usage anticipated by Mead (1934), who spoke of the "social act."

The terms "act" and "action" are widely used by authors in social science and philosophy. For this reason some distinctions seem needed here. The purpose of these distinctions is to draw rough boundaries around the referent of the terms as we use them. It is hoped that subsequent discussion throughout this monograph further clarifies our usage.

In the first place, by focusing on action in social contexts we use the term "act" in a narrower sense than do the philosophers of human action (e.g., those represented in Brand, 1970, and in White, 1968). The broader concern of these philosophers is with all human action, including such elemental acts as an individual's moving his hand when he is quite alone. But we wish to preserve the widespread distinction between human action and "mere behavior," such as the beating of one's heart, perspiring under the influence of fear (Taylor, 1966), and sneezing. And we believe we use the term "action" in the same spirit as, for example, White (1968), who concludes a point in his discussion by stating that "none of this shows, of course, that human actions must be voluntary, intentional, purposive, conscious, etc. . . . ; but only that they must be the sorts of occurrences of which it makes sense to ask whether they are any or all of these [p. 8]."

As Kendon (1975) points out, this approach to describing face-to-face interaction (and that of many others in this area) contrasts sharply with the approach of Bales (1950), who also uses the term "act." In Kendon's words, the category system used by Bales and others (reviewed by Heyns & Lippett, 1954; and by Weick, 1968) "classifies not so much the behavior itself as the intent that is judged to lie behind the behavior [p. 4]."

MAJOR CATEGORIES OF ACTION

For the sake of convenience, the broad spectrum of acts potentially contributing to face-to-face interaction has been subdivided in a variety of ways. A representative set of categories and terms might include the following: (a) paralinguage (Trager, 1958), covering those elements of vocalization not typically included in the phonological description of language; (b) body motion, or kinesics (Birdwhistell, 1970), or visible behavior (Kendon, 1972a); (c) proxemics (Hall, 1966): use of "social and personal space and man's perception of it [p. 1]"; (d) use of scent (social olfaction); (e) haptics (Austin,

1967): body contact between persons; (f) the use of artifacts, such as dress and cosmetics; and (g) language, as it is traditionally defined. These categories will be briefly described, together with major transcription systems (if any) in each case

Trager's (1958) paper proposing the term "paralanguage" remains a basic reference with respect to those actions. He distinguished *voice qualities*, "actual speech events, phenomena that can be sorted out from what is said and heard [pp. 4-5]," from *vocalizations*, "actual specifically identifiable noises (sounds) or aspects of noises [p. 5]." Examples of voice qualities would be pitch range, resonance, tempo, and vocal lip control. Examples of vocalizations would be intensity (or stress), pitch height (or level of vocal pitch at some moment), extent (or duration of a syllable), laughing, crying, whispering, and several other sounds such as "uh-uh" (English negation), "uh-huh" (English affirmation), clicks, hisses, and the "uh" of filled pauses. While it is true that Trager's system is relatively undifferentiated in many areas it remains remarkably useful for much practical work. Crystal and Quirk (1964) and Crystal (1969) provide valuable theoretical discussions of intonation and paralanguage, as well as their own systems for dealing with these phenomena.

Body motion refers to a wide variety of visible actions. For example, in the study reported in Part III, the body-motion transcription included such actions as head gestures and movements (nodding, turning, pointing, shaking, etc.) and directions of head orientation; shoulder movements (e.g., shrugs); any facial expressions that could be clearly seen; hand gestures and movements of all sorts (each hand described separately); foot movements (each foot separately); leg movements; posture and posture shifts; and use of objects, such as pipe, kleenex, papers, and clip board.

Some relatively comprehensive systems for describing body motion exist. For example, Birdwhistell (1970, 1971) has published two systems, termed "microkinegraphs" and "macrokinegraphs," respectively. These two systems reflect the "etic-emic" distinction often encountered in linguistics. An "etic" descriptive system is one that remains as close as possible to raw physical description of the behaviors involved, as in a phonetic description of speech. A phonetic descriptive system might be designed to be applicable to any sample of speech in any language. Contrasting with an "etic" system would be an "emic" one representing a hypothesis as to the essential elements of particular social codes under investigation. One might, for example, propose a phonemic system for describing English speech. Such a system would constitute a hypothesis as to the essential phonological elements of English speech. Birdwhistell's microkinegraphic system attempts an "etic" description of body motion. Consisting of line drawings, angles, and other symbols, it is extremely fine grained and purportedly independent of the movement practices of specific cultures. The macrokinegraphic system uses symbols that can be found on a typewriter keyboard and is said to reflect the typical movements

of "middle majority American movers." To our knowledge, neither system has been used by other investigators. Examples of Birdwhistell's use of the two systems may be found in the references cited above and in McQuown (1971).

Working within the tradition of ethology, Grant (1969) and McGrew (1970, 1972) have published inventories of typical body-motion actions (including facial expressions) they have encountered in the nursery-school children they have observed.

Ekman and Friesen have developed a system for transcribing facial expressions. Called the Facial Affect Scoring Technique (FAST), the system is designed for studies of the recognition of emotion on the basis of facial expression. Unlike the systems of, for example, Grant and McGrew, FAST is not an attempt to describe the set of facial expressions encountered in observed face-to-face interactions. Rather, as Ekman and Friesen explain, the facial categories were those that had proven useful for investigators concerned with judging emotion from the face. The system is based on matching each facial part of the observed expression with one of a series of pictures for each facial part, as posed by models. The system has not, at this writing, been published; however, it is generally described in Ekman, Friesen, and Tompkins (1971). (In addition, it may be noted that Ekman and Friesen, 1969, have published a conceptually based category system for hand movements.)

Ex and Kendon (1969) provide a notation system for the face. A modified version of the system was used by Kendon (1975b) in a study of the functioning of the face in interaction.

It is inevitable that investigators will encounter a somewhat different set of body-motion actions in different interaction situations. For example, Grant and McGrew in their studies of nursery-school children had to describe a set of actions considerably different from those encountered in the study of adult conversations presented in Part III. Studying subjects' actions during a word-association test, Krout (1935) observed a number of actions not reported by other investigators.

It is quite possible that investigators engaged in a given study will find useful categories in several different transcription systems, but no single available system entirely adequate to their needs. In such a case the investigator may devise a system that borrows from others, but also includes new categories necessary to account for observed actions. (Developing this type of transcription system is further considered in Part III.) In time, as more of such systems are developed and published, a highly useful set of categories for body motion may accumulate in the literature.

Hall (1963), who proposed the term "proxemics," has published a system for transcribing actions generally falling under that rubric. His "proxemic notation system" includes a representation of posture, the angle between the shoulders of two interactants, the distance between interactants, the type of