

This Week's Citation Classic

Kendon A. Some functions of gaze-direction in social interaction. *Acta Psychologica* 26:22-63, 1967. [Institute of Experimental Psychology, Oxford, England]

Films of two-person conversations were transcribed and analyzed from the point of view of how gaze direction is related to utterance and silence. It was found that patterns of looking were systematically related to features of talk and could be accounted for in terms of the monitoring functions of gaze. At the same time, evidence was presented that suggested that gaze direction may also play a role in the regulation of turn-taking in conversation. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®) indicates that this paper has been cited over 180 times since 1967.]

Adam Kendon
Department of Anthropology
Connecticut College
New London, CT 06320

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"In 1963 E.R.W.F. Crossman, then at Oxford, proposed that behavior in social interaction could be analyzed as if it were a perceptuo-motor skill. Together with Michael Argyle he established the Social Skills Project at the Institute (now Department) of Experimental Psychology at Oxford. At that time I had just completed my D. Phil. thesis on the temporal organization of talk in conversation, based on work I had done with Eliot Chappie at Rockland State Hospital, Orangeburg, New Jersey, and there I had proposed a very similar approach. Accordingly, I was invited to join Crossman and Argyle's project. Crossman proposed that we film some conversations so that we could examine the behavior involved and find out what the elements of action in social interaction might be. He proposed this method on analogy with the method followed in the analysis of perceptuo-motor skills: first film a skilled operator to see what patterns of action are followed. After developing a suitable apparatus, we filmed

a number of pairs of undergraduates who, meeting for the first time, were simply asked to 'get acquainted.' After some months of work on these films, in which I was joined by Jacques Ex of Nijmegen, who was in the institute as a visiting fellow, a workable transcription system was devised which made it possible to write down gaze direction, facial expression, head position, and body posture, frame by frame. All this was done in ignorance of Birdwhistell(1) and Schefflen,(2) whose work subsequently has greatly influenced me.

"With these detailed transcriptions we attempted to see what regularities there might be. Initial analyses, conducted without any hypothesis, were not very successful. One day, however, I was watching an interview from behind a one-way mirror and I was struck by the way the interviewee consistently looked away as he began his answers and looked back at the interviewer as he came to the end of his utterance. From my previous work on the timing of utterances in conversation, I had become interested in how smooth turn-taking might be achieved, and upon observing how gaze direction was patterned in this interview, it occurred to me that it might serve as a coordinating signal. With this idea in mind, I examined gaze direction in relation to speech in the filmed conversations and the findings led to the paper here being discussed.

"This paper has been cited frequently in part because it was one of the first to demonstrate that detailed descriptive analysis of behavior in social interaction could provide evidence for the role visible behavior plays in the interactive process. Since 1967, there has been a huge growth in work on gaze in social interaction.(3) Despite the frequency with which my paper has been cited, however, it is striking that no direct attempt to follow up on my findings was published until 1978."(4)

1. Birdwhistell R L. Kinesics and context; essays on body motion communication. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970. 338 p.
2. Schefflen A E. Communicational structure: analysis of a psychotherapy transaction. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973. 378 p.
3. Argyle M & Cook M. Gaze and mutual gaze. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976. 210 p.
4. Beattie G. Floor-apportionment and gaze in conversational dyads. *Brit. J. Soc. Clin. Psychol.* 17:7-16, 1978.