

THE DEEPER LEVELS OF FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

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1. The need to seek the deeper levels and problems of communication

My earlier attempts at investigating the levels of face-to-face interaction that seemed to be neglected in a greater or lesser degree in communication studies hopefully succeeded in presenting together the verbal and nonverbal systems that ought not to be ignored when seeking a realistic approach to the actual semiotic-communicative structuration of an encounter. It has been, however, the interest shown by communication researchers from different fields with respect to an earlier article in this journal (Poyatos, 1983a) that prompted me to offer a much more elaborate study of those deeper levels and problems which either escape us altogether or keep bothering us to no end as we try to analyze language and its nonverbal cosystems.¹

The type of joint transcription of the basic triple structure language-paralanguage-kinesics that I suggested before (Poyatos, 1983b, pp. 199-202) can only make one more aware of the fact that, although the tripartite complex is the most elaborate and uniquely anthropo-semiotic transactional tool, it could still be complemented, and even partially or totally replaced, by chemical, dermal and thermal messages. Once this total somatic dimension of communication was clear, and many missing links of an interactive encounter came into view, I gradually realized that I was still perpetuating a limited view of interaction that was affecting general linguistics and psycholinguistics, developmental studies, the clinical understanding of the patient's communication skills, the study of perception in interaction, of interaction and the environment, etc., and even research areas such as the employment interview. I knew, in other words, that my view of the encounter was still a limited one, for 'things happened' which I could not account for in spite of having defined a rather complex set of communicative elements.

This holistic concept of interaction can be developed only when interaction is understood as: the conscious or out-of-awareness exchange of behavioral and nonbehavioral, sensible and intelligible signs from the whole arsenal of somatic and extrasomatic systems (independently of whether they are activities or nonactivities) and the rest of the surrounding cultural systems, as they all act as sign emitting components (and potential elicitors of further emissions) which determine the specific characteristics of the exchange.

This paper, therefore, attempts to present a theoretical framework, which should suggest a methodological approach as well, for the exhaustive, holistic analysis of interaction, by discussing: the possible personal and extrapersonal components of face-to-face interaction; their sensory perception, and how physiopsychological synesthesial associations become also operative components; their intellectual evaluation by the participants; how both sensible and intelligible components may act independently from each other or in dual and multiple clusters; what elements constitute the qualifying characteristics of interactive

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activities and nonactivities; in which ways interactive components can be associated to preceding, simultaneous and succeeding ones; the encoding–decoding process and situations that can take place in interaction; and the different communicative problems to which the participants are exposed in the course of an interactive encounter.

2. The components of interaction

Given the definition of interaction offered above, the researcher who truly seeks an exhaustive analysis and understanding of any given encounter must face a whole panorama of possible interactive components among which he will identify those which definitely are seen to occupy a specific place between the beginning and the end of the encounter. To set out to study ‘*what*’ exactly happens in that situation—to later, hopefully, establish ‘*how*’ and ‘*why*’ things happen the way they do—without first carrying out an exhaustive search for *all* its components—results always in an incomplete picture; and we believe we see gaps that are not such gaps, while missing a number of interrelationships between language and nonverbal elements, as well as among the latter, that carry important messages and act as elicitors of activities themselves.

Figure 1, ‘face-to-face interaction components’, attempts to present that panorama in which one can identify the situation under analysis.

Internal components

The first broad differentiation that allows us to establish the two main categories of components is that between *internal*, that is, those which represent the active or passive elements that can be the object of mutual sign exchanges among the participants, or at any rate bear a direct relationship to that exchange (e.g. language, perfume, social status), and *external*, which may have an effect on the encounter, but from outside its nucleus.

Three categories of internal components are clearly distinguishable:

A. *Personal sensible bodily components*, truly generated by somatic activities or non-activities, within which we can differentiate three groups.

Personal sensible behavioral activities are, first of all, verbal language (its lexico-morphologico-syntactical structures and fundamental prosodic features), paralinguistic (all the culturally, biologically, physiologically and psychologically conditioned voice modification of that verbal deliverance, and the many accompanying independent word-like utterances, such as clicks, ingressive or egressive nasal frictions, throat clearings, ‘Uh-uh’, ‘Psst’, ‘Eeugh’, moaning sounds, hissing sounds, silences, etc. (Poyatos, in press a)) and kinesics (the body movements and intervening still positions, of visual, visual-acoustic and tactile or kinesthetic perception displayed with intended or unintended communicative value, from facial, eye and hand gestures, through greeting, preening, smoking and leg-crossing and walking manners, to cross-legged sitting or walking postures). Secondly, as a result of kinesic behavior, room size, room density or furniture arrangement, we adopt conscious or unconscious proxemic behaviors and attitudes, from totally impersonal ones to sought or forced intimate touch. Thirdly, the interactive situation under study may be of the kind in which other body sounds would have social or clinical relevance (e.g. intestinal rumbling, whizzing, tooth gnashing or chattering).

Personal nonbehavioral activities are represented by chemical, dermal and thermal reactions of olfactory, visual, dermal and even gustatory perception, as the case may be, which may also have a central message-conveying role, not only clinically but, what is neglected more

FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION COMPONENTS

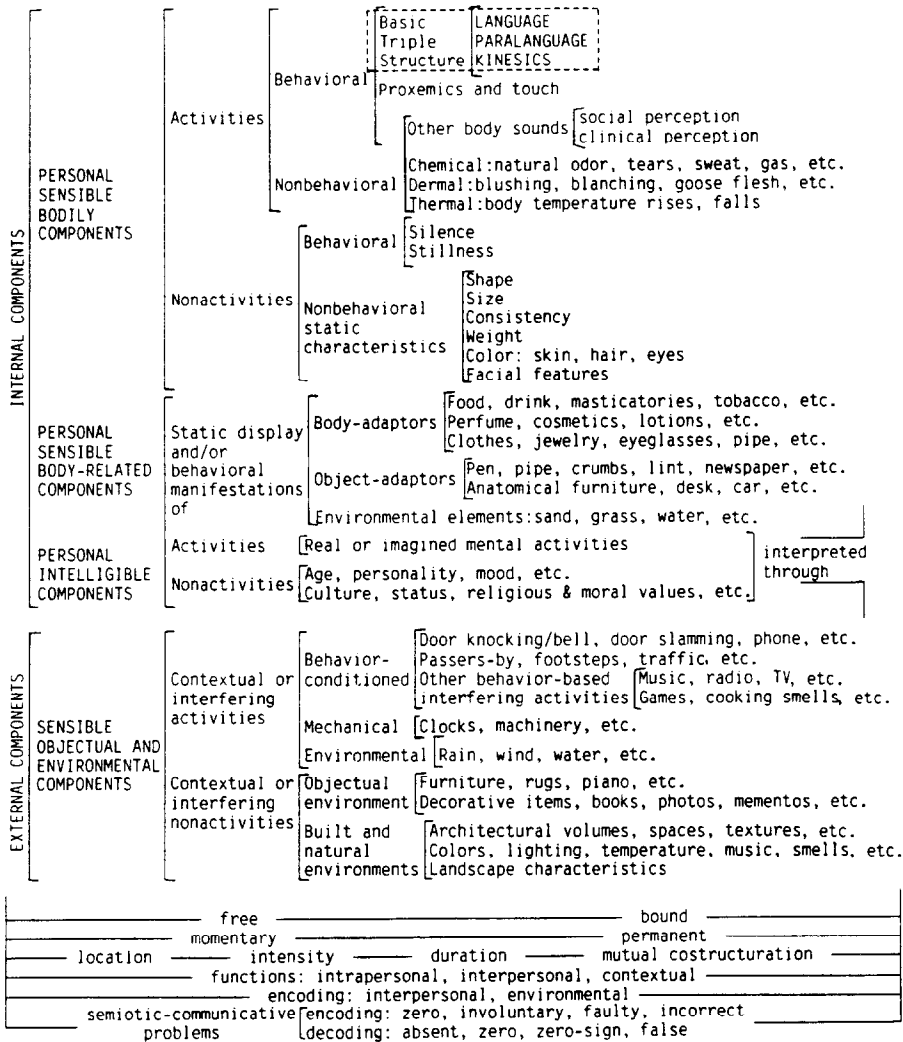


Fig. 1. The components of face-to-face interaction types, qualifiers, functions and problems.

often in interaction studies, socially as well. Such are the physiological type of sweat and the so-called emotional sweat (e.g. palmar sweat), the various forms of silent or language- or paralinguistic-accompanying tear shedding, pathological odors (whether due to organ failure, tissue deterioration or a schizophrenic's crisis) emotional dermal blushing or blanching, and the social or clinical rises and falls in body temperature.

Personal sensible nonactivities can be as important as what is being expressed verbally or kinesically, by themselves or combined with the former, as well as with other interaction components discussed below. Apart from silence and stillness—which are far from being voids or blanks in the interpersonal exchange (Poyatos, 1981)—the static bodily

characteristics of shape, size, consistency, weight and color of the body or parts of it and facial features of one participant can definitely be directed related to the verbal and nonverbal behaviors and attitudes of the others.

B. Personal sensible body-related components, that is, intimately associated with the body, function in interaction both in their static display and in their behavioral manifestations when they become part, or better, elicitors of our kinesic activities.

The include, first, the substances and objects called body-adaptors: nutritional and pseudonutritional products (food, drink, masticatories like gum, eastern betel and tobacco, etc.), cosmetics, perfumes and lotions, and clothes, jewelry, eyeglasses, cigarettes and pipes, which besides conditioning our language, paralinguistic and kinesics in conscious or unconscious ways, are also perceived by those who are interacting with us and judged by them for their appearance and qualities; secondly, the so-called object-adaptors, such as pens, pipes, newspapers, breadcrumbs or lint, which we may handle in the course of a conversation, as well as anatomical furniture or desk, which elicit specific postures and even specific attitudes toward our cointeractants; and even such environmental elements as sand, grass and water, which, when serving as supporters of the body, can truly elicit characteristic behaviors in an interactive encounter, thus becoming true components also.

C. The cointeractant's personal intelligible components, such as his or her age, personality, mood, culture, religious and moral values, status, and even his or her thoughts, whether they are real or we imagine them. Those intelligible (not basically sensibly apprehended) elements (see Poyatos, 1983b, Fig. 2.1) are actually perceived by us through the words, paralinguistic, gestures, manners, body characteristics, clothes, etc., of the other person; and also, as in the case of culture, certain personality traits and status are perceived through interior decoration, furniture and the personal objectual environment in general. They can become also effective components of the encounter which just cannot be neglected if we are to understand its deeper, less conspicuous levels and thus not miss an important dimension of interaction.

External components

External components are all those behavioral and nonbehavioral activities, as well as a number of static elements, which, as opposed to the internal ones, cannot be part of the mutual personal exchange of active or static signs generated by or related to bodily forms of communication, as has been illustrated in the previous sections, but rather surround the actual encounter, that is, its participants and their ongoing interpersonal multichannel encoding-decoding processes. There are still two more clearly distinguishable categories of elements, beyond the three discussed, external to the encounter proper.

D. Contextual or interfering activities, that is, activities that are produced through behavior, by mechanical artifacts or by environmental elements, which actually happen in the periphery of the encounter, but are not always perceived by the participants. If they are perceived, however, it can be simply as contextual elements in relation to the interpersonal interaction, either having no specific effect on it, that is, playing a *rather neutral role* (e.g. the sound of passers-by, of footsteps or traffic, the piped music in a public place, the banging of a door) or a positive *congruent role*, consciously or unconsciously affecting the encounter (e.g. the footsteps, the pendulum clock or the sound of rain, which

can enhance the atmosphere of intimacy in which conversation takes place, just as a particular type of music would).

On the other hand, many of those contextual components can have a definitely adverse effect on the encounter when they act as *interferences*, as is generally the case with door knocking, the sound of footsteps coming from upstairs, the interrupting ringing of a telephone, the roaring of a passing bus, the strong smell of someone else's cooking, all typical forms of privacy invasion. And the moment those interactive components cease to be contextual to become interferences they are lodged, so to speak, between internal components of that conversation (verbal expression, gestures, silences, etc.) along the communicative continuum of the encounter, acting very much as intruding or forced components. The matter of interference is, of course, intimately related to factors such as attention rate, age interactional fluency, psychological configuration, etc.

E. *Contextual or interfering nonactivities* are, however, semiotically active² sign manifestations of the objectual, built and natural environments, that is, detached from behavior. As with contextual activities, the participants' susceptibility to their influence on their performance varies greatly according to developmental factors, socioeconomic and educational status and, of course, the nature of the encounter. Assuming, therefore, that discourse and certain nonverbal components are not being affected in a given situation by those contextual nonactivities could make us miss some important interrelationships between the two. The objectual and built environments can certainly encourage, intimidate, soothe, etc., and predispose us to different attitudes toward the person or persons we are going to interact with. Witness the possible effect on a patient or client of the physician's plush office with expensive furniture and art objects, impressive diplomas, etc., the effect of a lavishly set dinner table on a lower status guest, or the positive effect of 'snug' architectural spaces, a specific room temperature, relaxing colors, and the tactually and thermally sensed texture of the couch upholstery in an intimate man-woman conversation.

Those are, therefore, the possible components of interaction. Again, it must be made clear that the signs of the internal components are susceptible of being exchanged in either direction between participants, while the external ones can only be perceived by them and not emitted. Both classes, however, should be registered in the type of realistic transcription mentioned earlier, for it would not be only the three basic cosystems of speech (much less verbal language alone) that would be annotated but also the other co-occurring nonverbal components of the encounter.

3. Sensory perception, synesthesial interpretation and intellectual evaluation of the interaction components

Once the different possible components of an interactive encounter are acknowledged, it seems in order to make the following observations as regards their sensory perception and also their intellectual conceptualization, for they seem to be missing, to my knowledge, in otherwise very valuable studies of communication and discourse.

The perceptual channels of interaction

A second glance at Fig. 1 shows that interaction components are perceived,

(a) auditorily: verbal language, paralinguistic, some forms of kinesics, other body sounds and external elements like footsteps, music, or traffic;

(b) visually: kinesic behaviors, proxemics, dermal reactions, static somatic characteristics, most body-adaptors, our objectual and built environments, and natural elements like grass, sand and water;

(c) olfactorily: sweat and other body excretions, stomachic or intestinal gas, etc.; perfume, lotions, food, a home, smell of nature, etc.

(d) tactually (more exactly, through the skin senses for touch, pressure, pain, heat and cold): chemical reactions like sweat and tears, thermal rises and falls, skin characteristics and reactions, body weight, texture of objects (the smoothness of a fabric, the texture of furniture, rugs, sand, etc.);

(e) kinesthetically mainly (in combination with dermal perception, that is, through muscles, joints, nerves and tendons): the contactual kinesic behaviors of others in intimate-distance situations as well as, for instance, the person's movements mediated by a shared couch;

(f) gustatorily, through in a much more limited (yet significant) way: the taste of food and drink ('hot', 'sharp', 'delicate', 'expensive'), pseudonutritionals like tobacco and betel, and the taste (coupled to other types of intimate-distance sensory perceptions) of bodily chemical reactions and of cosmetics.

Time and vision: two additional dimensions of perception

While vision, audition and olfaction are the so-called distal systems, and touch, kinesthesia and taste the proximal ones, and although only the olfactorily and gustatorily perceived signs are said to travel through time (vision and audition travel through space), it is an important fact—intimately related to the matter of the mutual interactive coconstruction of components, dealt with later—that, within the temporal limits of a personal encounter, there is definitely a chronemic³ dimension to audition, vision, touch and kinesthetic perception also as part of the intellectualization process discussed below. For instance, a word, a paralinguistic peel of laughter or a subtle chuckle, a gesture, the slam of a door, a passerby, a handshake, an embrace, depending on its intensity (discussed below as one of the qualifying features of components) and its significance, will remain consciously or unconsciously in the receiver's mind after its actual occurrence, that is, while others are already operating in the interaction stream between the constant input-output ends of the encounter.

Furthermore, it is also important to remember that the interactive visual perception of internal or external, personal or nonpersonal components, from gestures and clothes to furniture or decorative objects, is not limited to macular vision only (which covers an angle of 3° in the vertical plane and 12–15° in the horizontal one), as it depends very much on peripheral vision (covering approximately a 90° angle). This means that a passer-by, the gestures of a person in another group at a party, or the impressive ring on our partner's hand (all away from macular perception), are being registered also, perhaps are in the threshold of consciousness sometimes, and can certainly become even regulatory components of the encounter.

The role of synesthesis associations

When discussing the 41 possible channels of interbodily communication elsewhere (Poyatos, 1983b, pp. 55–66) I placed much emphasis on the great interactive importance of synesthesia (later dealt with also in Poyatos, in press b). What remained to be discussed at that time, although it was implicitly suggested, was precisely the fact that the certain

components of the interaction can become such, not only through direct perception (e.g. the sight of facial features, the smell of perspiration, the interfering noise of traffic), but also through synesthesia. For example, a man's visual perception of a tight-fitting dress worn by a woman lets him assume synesthesially the consistency of her body, which then becomes (not necessarily consciously on his part) a conditioning component of their encounter by affecting his gaze behavior as well as perhaps even his verbal language and paralanguage, which may in turn act as a regulator of her own behaviors. Sometimes synesthesia may involve seemingly unrelated elements; for instance, if the woman keeps stroking (consciously or unconsciously) the 'smooth' arm of her chair, which might correlate, to begin with, with the 'smoothness' of her own paralanguage. There are, therefore, various levels of synesthesial associations, which anyone who tries to analyze the interpersonal communication mechanisms must acknowledge, even if attempting to understand exclusively how language operates from a psycholinguistic point of view.

A further elaboration of this topic, and a worthwhile one, would include, for instance: the possible roles and limitations of synesthesial associations in situations of reduced interaction (Poyatos, 1983b, pp. 85–89), such as with the blind, the deaf, a person born with no arms, etc.; or its developmental aspects, as synesthesia depends on previously stored experiences of sensory perceptions.

The intellectualization of sensory sign perception

The attempt to understand fully the intricacies and complexities of discourse and its surrounding activities would totally fail if we considered solely the sensorial perception of its components, whether sound, a gesture, and object or an odor. There is no such thing as an exclusively sensory perception, for quite often that sensory perception undergoes a process of 'intellectualization'. The sociopsychological and linguistic implications of such an assertion, while they would take many pages, could be succinctly suggested. In the often used man–woman example, simultaneously to their mutual perception of their sensible signs as they are emitted (language, mannerisms, perfume, clothes, etc.), they are, at another but parallel level, 'thinking about them' as well, evaluating them. It is as if he, for instance, were saying with the silent language of the mind: 'You are talking to me, telling me (...) with a voice of (...) characteristics, and those gestures, activating those facial features, while letting me be aware (even though I don't look) of your figure and your posture, and while I smell your perfume. I like the sound of your voice as you talk to me, I am attracted by the way you accompany your voice with your hand and with your face and with your eyes, and by the way those facial features move "as they say that right now"; and I see all those things as befitting your whole self, and I become even more aware of it through that perfume that seems to envelop your voice, eyes, face, hands, as you tell me what you are telling me. I definitely like you. It is all those things of yours put together...'. Added to those direct sensations are, of course, the synesthesial ones; and, beyond those internal personal components of that interaction, it will be the mutual orientation of the twosome, the characteristics of the room, and perhaps the satisfaction caused by the physiopsychological effects of the ongoing eating and drinking, as well as the feeling of 'public privacy' enjoyed by them, that will complete the series of semiotic–communicative processes among which we cannot isolate verbal language, not even the basic triple structure, nor any of the sign systems that are included in the encoding–decoding exchanges between the two persons.

If we should analyze the whole encounter or a conversational portion of it, we would

see that when he takes the speaker's turn his own deliverance (language-paralanguage-kinesics and orientation, proxemic shifts, etc.), including the topic, may have been conditioned in a greater or lesser degree by what she said and by all those nonverbal signs he perceived sensibly and judged intellectually. How exactly they became conditioned would fall within the discussion of the mutual interactive coconstruction of verbal and nonverbal components, discussed in section 6. Furthermore, those functions would have to be indicated in a faithful joint transcription, otherwise their coconstruction would simply be missed. Granted that it takes much insight, a painstaking study of the exchange and no little intuition (which, as is often the case, we would see fully confirmed); but only thus can discourse and the mechanism of conversation be understood.

But there is still more to the intellectualization processes. To say that the more active participant in the encounter, the speaker, carries out a lesser activity in this sense is not to say that he is merely a sender of signs; for, in the above example, one should examine the women's sensory-intellectual engagement and her equally simultaneous intellectualization processes functioning in a lower key—definitely more intense during her own paralinguistic pauses (silences)—but also perfectly coconstructed with his performance. The diagram in Fig. 2 attempts to show the interchangeable roles of speaker and listener with regard to these processes and the more intense activity of the latter.

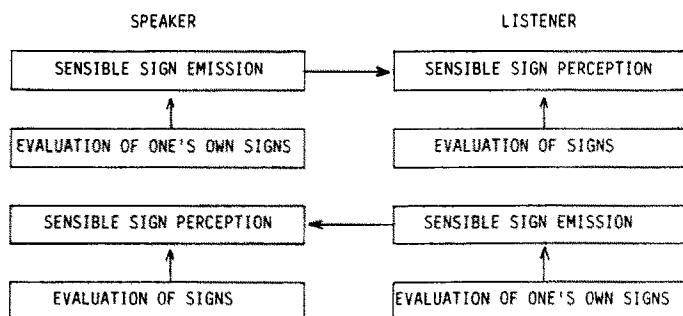


Fig. 2. Intellectual evaluation of interactive sign perception.

Other aspects of interaction included in this intellectualization processes, or suggested by them, are, for instance: the interpretation of the personal intelligible components, such as status, personality or moral values through some of the sensible ones, as shown in Fig. 1; the ontogenetic development of such complementary-channel associations, since intellectualization of sensible signs tends to make the encounter more complex, both semiotically and socially; and, to mention one more, the relation between these associations and the long-lasting quality of the voice and, above all, of gestures and manners of some persons, which others can remember and reconstruct most vividly, and even act on them, as happens when those behaviors are brought back by feelings of love, hatred, fear, etc., the reactions then ranging from daydreaming to anger.

4. Free and bound and momentary and permanent components

Since an interactive encounter is a continuum made up of verbal and even more nonverbal behavioral and nonbehavioral, sensible and mental activities and nonactivities (including

silences and stills) in association with all the surrounding extrasomatic systems, and since each of those somatic or extrasomatic, external or internal components has a specific spatial and temporal locus in the development of that continuum, it is clear that, before seeking the various qualifying features of any of them (e.g. language, gestures), its coding and decoding and its possible meaningful interrelationship with other components, one should ponder about the concepts 'free' and 'bound', and then 'momentary' and 'permanent', with relation to the occurrence and flow of the interactive encounter.

Free and bound components

By *free component* one must understand the occurrence of that component when it does not seem to be related to one or more of the others in any way which might appear to affect the interaction. For instance, a beckoning gesture by itself, a proxemic shift for more comfortable conversational distance, a transitional silence between different topics, an interactive neutral sort of dress that does not seem to condition or elicit any part of the encounter, the pipe a man smokes while talking ('functionally' puffing at it), a thought, the couch where two cointeractants are sitting, normally oriented toward each other in a normal straight posture, a doorbell, or music, that does not affect their exchange, the interior decoration and objectual environment while in interaction with a same-status visitor, etc. In any of these instances, while those elements cannot be said to fall outside the encounter because they are part of it just by being there, open to the participants' sensible or intelligible awareness of them, they are not, however, attached to others in any significant way.

A *bound component*, on the other hand, is any behavioral or nonbehavioral activity, and any nonactivity or somatic or extrasomatic static sign manifestation, which appears to be associated with at least one other component. Now, these two or more related components can be from within the same person's verbal-nonverbal repertoires, from two different participants, from more than two participants, or from one or more persons and the external environmental elements. For instance: a typical verbal-paralinguistic-kinesic expression; a tongue click + wink of one person and the blushing of another; the blushing of a woman and the co-occurrent or succeeding silence of her male cointeractant; the breathy voice of a man and the woman's facial features; her sensually feminine way of handling her cigarette + her slightly moaning voice quality + her conspicuous perfume and his verbal expression + gaze behavior; her tight dress and his eye contact; a man's use of his pipe as a conversational language marker⁴ (thus language + pipe) and his cointeractant's annoyed tone of voice; one participant's verbal-paralinguistic-kinesic deliverance and what he believes his partner is thinking; the ringing of the telephone and someone's conversational external-interference pause; a person's sudden speeded-up speech and another person's approaching footsteps; someone's continuous loud voice volume + tense facial speech gestures and the nearby noise of traffic; smooth, even speech rhythm + relaxed gestures + relaxed posture and the surrounding room silence + silence-enhancing clock tick-tick; slouching posture + careless speech and the couch; a guest's tense speech + unrelaxed posture and his higher-class host's intimidating surroundings.

As soon as we recognize the frequency of these associations we also realize that any of those components can as well be significantly related to one or more of the intelligibly perceived elements (e.g. perfume fragrance and social status, hairdo and religious affiliation) and that a behavior, say, a verbal insult or random unconscious desk tapping, can be linked to a given thought.

Furthermore, it is important to differentiate the association between only two interaction components (e.g. the woman's blushing and the man's gaze, one person's proxemic shift and the other's change in voice volume), that is, *dual binding*, and the situation in which clearly three or more components from whatsoever source are behaviorally or behaviorally-nonbehaviorally bound among themselves, that is, *multiple binding*. For instance: in the course of an employment interview in which a female secretary faces her prospective male employer, the almost unblinking eye contact by the impeccably dressed man, while sitting motionless slowly drawing at his cigarette and blowing out smoke, is simultaneously triggering her slight fidgeting with her ring, slightly faster speech and repeated eye contact and gaze aversion, the behaviors of both of them conditioned in turn by the overriding characteristics of the impressively decorated (status-identifying) office. If we were to analyze the verbal and nonverbal development of the interview, *component clusters* such as this would have to be clearly identified in order to determine their mutual coconstruction (dealt with below) and, most importantly, how that coconstruction reveals the semiotic-communicative cohesion and therefore the full signification and value of the components, which otherwise would escape us, even if we did acknowledge them, but independently of each other.

This analysis of components reveals, therefore, the fact that the encounter consists of a succession of semiotic clusters, bound pairs and free components, in other words, that it is susceptible of the analyst's segmentation, while, at the same time, shows elements that are continuous, overriding the segmental ones, as will be seen in the next section. It reveals, furthermore, that those which are defined below as 'permanent' and override the flow of the others (e.g. perfume, clothes, room temperature, facial features, the person's voice characteristics,⁵ etc.) are not necessarily bound for their whole duration, but perhaps only, if at all, when other permanent or temporary components are interactionally associated with them.

What this differentiation shows also is the relativity of the concept of 'free component', for it is very likely that, if we repeat the analysis of the encounter more than once, we will find binding associations which did not become apparent before. Using the last example, we might find the next time around that there was also a quick vertical scanning of the female interviewee by the man, of which she was aware; or that his cross-legged posture in front of her had lasted as a powerful component long enough to increase her anxiety, as she obviously did not change hers either (which she would have, had he provided her with the opportunity by doing so himself). Therefore, an interactive gesture that at first might appear to be 'free', later might be recognized as 'bound' to whatever sensible active or static signs the other person was displaying, any intelligible features, or even thoughts, mood, etc., the cointeractant may have correctly or incorrectly assumed, and any external components that seemed to be merely contextual.

The four levels of free and bound component research

It is interesting—particularly for some research purposes—to consider free and bound components on four levels according to the systems involved:

(a) the free and bound occurrences only within the basic triple structure, language-paralanguage-kinesics; this is the most important level for the analysis of discourse and for the development of the theory and methodology of nonverbal communication in foreign-language teaching,⁶ as well as in language development studies, and for the understanding

of the associative possibilities and limitations in the main types of reduced interaction (Poyatos, 1983 b, pp. 85–89, 169–170), that is, blindness and deafness;

(b) the free and bound occurrences within the strictly somatic systems, including the triple structure; which would further the understanding of the psycholinguistic mechanisms of interaction; again, quite critical as regards the reduced possibilities of the blind and the deaf (e.g. the lack of the visual characteristics of the cointeractant's body as behavior-eliciting components in the encounter);

(c) the free and bound occurrences of the sensible somatic and extrasomatic systems, through which the participation of the personal and extrapersonal sign constructs reveals the whole complexity of discourse in its total context; and also the channel limitation in reduced interaction, imposed, for instance, by anosmia;

(d) free and bound occurrences among sensible and intelligible sign constructs, that is, the most elusive level, yet the one that shows an otherwise totally hidden dimension of interaction and conversation; a dimension severely curtailed when, for instance, the blind fail to associate visual signs with, for instance, status or moral values.

Temporary and permanent components

The next step along this progressive theoretical and methodological approach to an interactive encounter, after establishing its free and bound components, is to determine their basic temporal dimension in order to further ascertain the degree in which their occurrence may be relevant in its development. This entails the differentiation between 'temporary' and 'permanent', which can be best defined by reference to Fig. 1.

Momentary components are those of varying but relatively short or very brief duration. They include, first of all: words, paralinguistic features (except those which span the whole length of the encounter, such as voice timbre or rhythm), most gestures and manners, short-lasting postures and certain proxemic attitudes; normally, chemical, dermal and thermal reactions; the consistency of a body part while momentarily holding it; behaviors involving body-adaptors and object-adaptors; most real or assumed mental activities; behavioral external sensible components; and certain occurrences of environmental elements, such as a peal of thunder or a brief blackout. But since the status of components depend not only on their emission and the length of our exposure to them, but on our perception of them (for it can be said for research purposes that something does not become a component until such time as it has a function in the interaction), any temporary experience of an otherwise ever-present element is a momentary component (e.g. a glimpse, during a conversation, of a Bible on our doctor's desk).

Permanent components within the encounter are those which span its whole length or a rather long segment of it. They include: certain paralinguistic features; long-lasting postures and proxemic attitudes (perhaps imposed by furniture arrangement); overriding chemical, dermal and thermal signs (e.g. perspiration, smell, paleness); facial features and other static body characteristics; behavioral or nonbehavioral manifestations of body-adaptors (e.g. gum chewing during a whole encounter, clothes, a pipe, a perfume, a couch); real or assumed intelligible components (e.g. status, culture); behavior-based on objectual and environmental components (e.g. music coming from next door, cooking smells, furnishings, temperature). However, there are permanent, long-lasting components that are *changeable*, such as voice volume, sitting, standing, a cross-legged posture, the conver-

sational distance that depends on moveable furniture rearrangement, the use of a pipe, music, mood, traffic noise; while others are *unchangeable* because they span the whole length of the encounter, as happens with a permanent nasal and high-pitched voice, heavy sitting furniture, status, personality, body or room odors, interior decoration, etc. This differentiation is worth considering, as it suggests, for instance, how it is in our hands sometimes to contribute to, or hinder, the optimum development of an interaction once it is in progress by, for instance, shifting posture as an interviewer to make the interviewee do the same and relax, pulling chairs closer together, turning the television off, etc.

The total intersomatic exchange, then, must be regarded as being influenced by these two main temporal characteristics for the longer or shorter effects they may have upon the participants and the interaction as a whole.

5. The qualifying features of components: location, intensity, duration

It is not unusual to see analyses of interaction in which the researcher studies the various constituents of the encounter, though perhaps not exhaustively, yet neglects to indicate and give due weight to the four aspects of those components which are the qualifying features and, therefore, should be acknowledged in any serious study.

Location refers to the temporal position of any somatic, extrasomatic or environmental activity or nonactivity within the encounter, with respect either to its actual presence between the beginning and the end of that encounter, 'where' it happens (which can be temporary or permanent), or to the point at which it affects the interaction, which does not necessarily coincide with its mere presence. Only components that do not span the whole length of the interaction (that is, temporary ones) can be said to have a mobile location, if we think of their 'being somewhere' within the encounter (e.g. a verbal expression, a postural shift, footsteps), since the permanent ones 'are' in the whole encounter. If, however, we want to refer only to the time when that component—for instance, facial features or landscape characteristics—is acknowledged and/or affects in some way the communicative or interactional flow, then the otherwise permanent elements can have also a specifically isolable functional location 'within' the encounter. Therefore, location, whether strictly *functional* or *temporal*, can be an instantaneous affair (c.g. a quick glimpse of someone's threadbare sleeve), something longer (e.g. tearful eyes during part of the conversation), or an element overriding the whole encounter (e.g. perfume). Thus the interactive characteristics of any one of the components can be affected in a greater or lesser degree by when exactly it happens, as it may depend on its being closer to or farther away from the two end points and the other components. Psycholinguistic analysis, then, can gain much if a multiple-system transcription of language and accompanying channels indicates the functional location of certain nonverbal components in order to understand certain developments, reaction, etc.

Intensity refers to the degree of the main characteristic or characteristics of the component, that is, its most consciously perceived feature, for instance: a tensely articulated verbal expression, a very slow headshake, the length of a posture, a very deep blush, a long silence, rather neutral facial features, strong shaving lotion, a very modest watch, the duration of memory searching, the anxiety-creating insistence of door knocking, very soft footsteps, an excessively decorated room, a deep-pile rug, the semidarkness of an intimate lounge, soft piped music. The need to acknowledge this 'degree of occurrence'

should be obvious, since the interactive function played by components depends greatly on it: a relaxed blinking passing stare is not the same thing as an unblinking intent stare with high degree of eyelid and eyebrow tension. And, while the researcher might indicate the qualities of a stare as conspicuous parakinesic behaviors, he could very well neglect, for instance, the intensity of visual environmental components, which is probably affecting the development and characteristics of the encounter, from lexical choice and paralinguistic and kinesic deliverance of speech to the duration of the exchange itself. On the other hand, it is the intensity of a momentary component that produces its *lingering effect* beyond its actual occurrence, an effect which will affect the participants' behaviors (as described below when discussing the components' mutual coconstruction) and which is also responsible for the effective or operative duration mentioned next.

Duration, independently of the functional location of components and of whether they are momentary or permanent, refers to their exact temporal length, which, again, may definitely affect the surrounding behaviors and the encounter as a whole. For instance: syllabic length (drawled or clipped), a leg-crossing manner (very slowly or rapid), a real or assumed thought in our cointeractant, the ringing of the telephone, the rain outside, etc. Besides the obvious fact that elements that are present during the encounter (e.g. furniture, lighting, temperature, facial features, clothes, perfume) would simply be indicated as such, duration deserves to be discussed from an additional perspective besides that of the actual temporal length. It is the *effective* or operative duration related to the 'functional location' mentioned earlier (as we may want to register the specific duration of the interactive effect of a component on one or more interactants inasmuch as it can be reasonably measured) and it goes beyond its actual duration, as with the effect of a violent behavior, or a highly disruptive noise; an effect of which actually the person may not be aware at all, but which could still be quite obvious. One of the problems with this effective duration of components, say, a verbal insult, is that the effect we wish to measure may very well be an *intermittent effect*, clearly appearing and disappearing (e.g. the flitting facial muscular tenseness repeatedly triggered by the pounding memory of the insult).

6. The mutual interactive coconstructions of components with preceding, simultaneous and succeeding ones, and their internal and contextual relations

Knowing now what qualifies as an interactive component, that it can be either free or bound to others, and that it can be characterized by its location in the communicative interaction stream, by its intensity and by its duration, it remains, in order to grasp its whole reality, to examine its clear (or not so clear) meaningful coconstruction with the surrounding elements in the interaction. It is in fact the most enticing and intricate feature to approach. It refers to: first, not only the relationship of each of the speaker's behavioral or nonbehavioral activities or nonactivities with his other more or less immediate ones—preceding, simultaneous, succeeding—but also its relationships with those of his cointeractants'; secondly, the relationships among those interpersonal elements and the external ones.

A posteriori, simultaneous, and a priori effects

The diagram in Fig. 3, 'The mechanisms of interactive coconstructions', may serve as a visual guide for a brief discussion of the three ways in which components can affect each

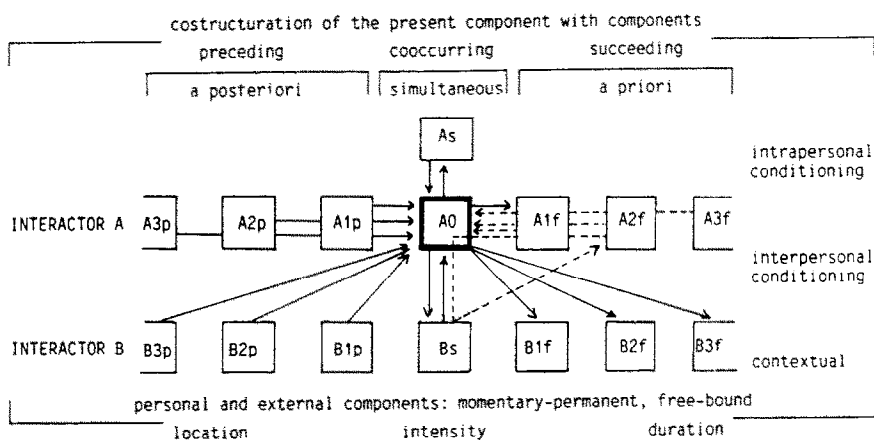


Fig. 3. The mechanisms of interactive costructurations.

other: *a posteriori* (through preceding components), simultaneously (through cooccurring components) and *a priori* (through succeeding components), the first two of which are, of course, intimately related to their location, intensity and duration.

In the diagram, two participants are identified as Interactor A and Interactor B. The central square represents the interactive slot⁷ where one of Interactor A's present behavioral/nonbehavioral activities/nonactivities (AO) takes place; the square above it represents the slot for his simultaneous ones (As); the squares to the left of it stand for the interactive slots where his previous activities/nonactivities have taken place, farther and farther away from his present one (A1p, A2p, A3p, etc.); and the squares to the right of it stand for those farther and farther into the future (A1f, A2f, A3f, etc.). As for Interactor B, the same pattern is followed. The arrowed lines represent the effect of some components on other components, specifically on the central present one that is used as the main example here, but also as it happens in other directions in the present, from past to present, from present to future and from future to present.

A posteriori costruction. This is, of course, the most frequent type of costruction, or intercomponent effect, yet not always clearly distinguishable. For instance, returning to the man-woman example, Interactor A's intense 'I love you!' (A1p) leads to his present intent stare (AO), or it could have been his immediately previous behavior (A2p), or the one before (A3p), or one even farther back. But Interactor B's immediately preceding behavior or nonactivity (B1p) (e.g. her looking away from him) could have been an added, or the sole, stimulus for his own stare, as could have been any of the previous ones (B2p, B3p, and so on); in both instances depending on the location, duration, and, above all, intensity of the affecting behavior or nonbehavior. In other words the slot for interactor A's present behavior could have been filled with a different component, or he could have said what he would have not said otherwise. Moreover, it can be the cumulative stimulus effect of his and/or her previous activities or nonactivities (i.e. 4p, 3p, 2p, 1p) that finally brings about the verbal expression, or the gesture, or tear shedding, or the intent stare in the example given, or a silence. Or it could be the lingering effect of even A7 and/or B7 (e.g. an embrace) travelling 'over' and 'through' more recent activities to affect the present one.

On the nonbehavioral level, the effective duration and location of, for instance, Interactor B's static facial signs can be responsible of Interactor A's stare, but so could perfume, or a dress. A personal behavioral or nonbehavioral personal activity can also be triggered by the cumulative effect of, for instance, alcohol consumption, or intimate proxemic relationship, or dim light, or the real or assumed mental processes of the partner. The cumulative effect and a momentary component may join in triggering the behavior, such as intimate distance, perfume and then (as stereotyped in films) a sudden peal of thunder, which finally leads to an embrace.

It must be pointed out at this time how a controllable cumulative effect, whether personal or extrapersonal, can be manipulated in interaction to elicit the desired behavior or attitude in the other person. This, of course, can be done out of selfish ulterior motives or to really aid the cointeractant (e.g. to purposely expose a business relation to what is called 'rear fear', that is, having him sitting with his back to the door; or, on the contrary, helping an interviewee to relax by talking over a cup of coffee or a drink). The analysis of the *a posteriori* costruction could be hampered, however, if one relies only on sensibly apprehended components, without seeking the possible effect of synesthiesal associations, perfectly effectual, yet the hardest to ascertain because they remain hidden.

Simultaneous costruction. Taking AO as Interactor A's present interactive component, As would stand for one of his other present ones within his own repertoire. We can thus see how, for instance, his blushing may affect his own paralinguage, gestures and postures, how his whispering conditions his congruent secretive facial expression (because of the typical coherence of the basic triple structure language-paralinguage-kinesics), how his own nakedness and contact with his body at the beach elicits preening manners and postures he would not display otherwise, just as an unusual outfit would.

However, there are two levels here that should not be confused: one is the occurrence of, for instance, language-paralinguage-kinesics, or paralinguage and weeping, as naturally bound elements that happen in fixed clusters; and another very different thing is the simultaneous effect of one component upon another, which is what is meant by 'simultaneous' in this case. The first thing we see is that blushing, whispering or the naked body (or Interactor B's simultaneous components for that matter) are actually elements that begin at least immediately before the elicited or affected behavior and end before or after it. This makes simultaneous costruction rather similar to the *a posteriori* type. Also, external components are involved (e.g. ongoing traffic noise and loud voice, intimate lighting and intimate behavior). In addition, we find that, unlike intrapersonal costruction, the interpersonal one can involve activities of the same type (e.g. the other person's silence may elicit and prolong my own, his verbal expression my own simultaneous speech).

A priori costruction. This is the most neglected aspect of intrapersonal and interpersonal, as well as person-environment, costruction. We tend to seek only the past cause-effect relation, as if the future events did not operate until they happen. However, close observation and experience reveals that, besides the new *a posteriori* effect of the present activities (AO) on the succeeding ones, the future activities of one participant (A1f, A2f, A3f, etc.), that is, what he knows he might say or do, may condition *a priori* what he is saying or doing now, for instance: a man may intentionally prolong his speech pause

while intently staring at the woman because he predicts the ensuing embrace (A2f, or A5f); although, if he cannot predict it, the long, intense silence (because of the characteristics of that silence (see Poyatos, 1981) and its accompanying kinesic behavior or stillness, for instance) may elicit it anyway, in himself or in both of them; while his present behavior, the silence (AO), will condition her subsequent activities (words, blushing, tears, gaze, etc.) with an *a posteriori* effect. This form of *a priori* relationship may involve extrapersonal future components, such as an anticipated or feared interfering activity.

But the most intriguing form of *a priori* coconstruction is what can be termed (Poyatos, in press b) *advanced hidden feedback*, when something that has not happened yet affects, not only the person who will display it, but his cointeractants as well. This happens as indicated by the discontinued lines forming a triangle in Fig. 3: the man in the above example has his or their embrace in mind; his unconscious gaze behavior, his facial muscle tonus and perhaps his postural or proxemic shift lets her anticipate it correctly; she is conditioned positively or negatively and is in the position to emphasize that upcoming unilateral or bilateral behavior, or deemphasize it, perhaps even abort it altogether, and all because she detected the effect of his own intention on himself before it became a reality, through one of more cues. The relevance of this advanced feedback cannot be emphasized enough, as only its manipulative functions can drastically affect the development of, for instance, an employment interview or a therapist–client one. But it operates more often even than we the participants are aware of, and certainly in ordinary everyday interaction, depending, of course, on the participants' sensitivity or responsiveness to changes of small magnitude, such as those which serve as cues, and which, first of all, are developed in the individual as part of his growingly subtle interactive skills.

Intrapersonal, interpersonal and contextual relationships

To complete this panorama of what is involved in social interaction it might be useful to point out in which ways its sensible components can be mutually interrelated in the course of an ordinary conversation on a purely intrapersonal or interpersonal level; in other words, how they can affect in varying degrees our own mutual attitudes and our behavioral and nonbehavioral activities. While phonetic, lexical, syntactical and semantic word variations are tied to variations in the use of nonverbal modalities, they can also affect, and be affected by, those of the other participants, both being related in turn to the extrasomatic and environmental sign system, as has been seen earlier. These relations, part of the coconstruction just discussed, are:

As modifier of one's own behavior, that is, a self-regulatory function, by changing: only its meaning (e.g. when the tongue click 'Tz' by itself gives a following 'Yes' a rather doubtful tinge, or when blushing contradicts the co-occurrent 'I don't mind'); both its meaning and its form (e.g. of the click 'Tz' truly makes that 'Yes' a clearly hesitating one, or if the blushing elicits a gesture of embarrassment instead of the intended words); and even changing the behavior itself (e.g. not eliciting a verbal 'Yes', but a shoulder shrug).

As modifier of our cointeractant's behavior, that is, a mutually interactional function, in which case it can change its form and meaning (e.g. a different type of handshake according to our initial warm or cold greeting), or the behavior itself (e.g. just a headnod or a polite smile instead of the intended handshake); but not just the meaning in the way in which our own behavior directly modifies the semantic content of the next one.

As a contextual element, as with 'Tz' in 'Well, tz, I think I can do it', in which the click does not add anything to the message; or a co-occurrent postural shift which neither supports nor emphasizes or contradicts the verbal statement (as it could in some situations); or, at the interpersonal level, any behavioral or nonbehavioral personal component which does not seem to have an interactional effect.

Again, although these three functions refer only to the interpersonal level, it must be understood, first, that they also involve any of the extrasomatic components that can be associated with the somatic ones (e.g. a cigarette and manners, a very small table and an intimate proxemic forward shift, fidgeting with an impressive piece of jewelry); and second, that there are beyond those interpersonal processes other truly interactional external functions which, as has been discussed already, can affect in obvious or hidden ways our behavioral exchange and the very development of the encounter, granting it precisely its peculiar characteristics: the way the other person dresses, a dinner table very elegantly set, a hospital room, a church, etc.

7. The encoding–decoding processes and problems in interaction

The last stage in this progressive probing of the deeper levels of interaction, for which it is indispensable that we first become aware of the whole range of components—both the ones we are personally equipped with and those which surround us and may affect the interaction—involves an analysis of precisely how all those signs are exchanged, what exactly can happen to them between their input at the emitter's end and their output at the receiver's end, and the various semiotic-communicative problems the participants may have to face.

Encoding of the interaction components

We know that we are exposed constantly to all the signs represented in Fig. 1, as they are all potential components of our interpersonal or person–environment interaction. But they become part of it only when encoding–decoding process takes place. Now, from the point of view of total interpersonal and person–environment interaction, we can speak of encoding and decoding if we regard encoding as being of two types: *interpersonal behavioral encoding* (whether conscious or not), that is, personally-generated language, kinesics, body shape, worn perfume, or door knocking; and *environmental encoding*, independently of the encounter and prior to it, yet affecting its behaviors when it takes place (i.e. objectual and environmental signs and messages associated with furniture, lighting, colors, temperature, the general natural surrounding, etc.). In other words, there are sign-generating activities that take place between the sign sources and their receivers, and they must be acknowledged and studied if we are to weigh the communicative processes of social interaction in their full complexity as well as the semiotic–communicative problems they may pose. Since the encoding of environmental signs does not become effective, from the point of view of interaction, until such time as the person in the interactive or noninteractive situation reacts to it consciously or unconsciously (e.g. adopting a posture considered fitting to the formality of the room, acting livelier due to its colors), I am referring only to interpersonal encoding situations and problems, among which the following four are most important.

Zero encoding can be due, first, to our emitting *verbal deficiency*, as when we simply

lack words to say what we want to say ('we don't know how to put it'), in which case we might attempt to express it through a gesture; for instance, the typical use of pictograph (i.e. tracing in the air or on a surface the shape of the referent for which we lack the proper word) or making a forward gesture away from the chest to signify 'extrovert' for the lack of the word or because literally 'we don't know what to say' at all. It could also be, of course, *nonverbal deficiency*, as lack of the proper greeting or thankful bowing in Japan, even not unfolding one's napkin among napkin-using people, or walking into someone else's room without knocking. But it can also be due to our *intention to withhold information*. The absence of signs in all instances of zero encoding results, of course, in certain semiotic-communicative gaps that cause the receiver's state of 'absent decodability', there being no signs to interpret, whether or not he knows that gap could or should have been filled. Naturally, whether the speaker lacks words or does not want to say them he may still leak information through various nonverbal channels, such as gesture, gaze behavior or blushing.

Involuntary encoding refers precisely to that kind of unintended personal sign emission, and it has received more attention as kinesic behavior (e.g. Poyatos, 1983b, pp. 135-136, 173-174), but mostly as regards psychopathology (see references in Poyatos, 1983 just cited; also, e.g. Schefflen, 1968). One more look at Fig. 1 suggests that other components as well are subject to involuntary coding. On the other hand, involuntary is not necessarily *unconscious* (e.g. instances of foot shuffling, light blushing, smell of sweat, showing food while eating with the mouth open, letting one's underwear show), but also *conscious* (e.g. blushing, tearful eyes, old clothes, dirty shoes, provocative body shape, smell of sweat).

Faulty encoding, on the other hand, refers to the instances in which the conscious, intentional production of verbal and nonverbal signs does take place, but showing intermittent gaps and irregularities that is, lack of expected or appropriate signs (i.e. what below is defined as 'zero sign') and/or irregularities in their qualifying features, mainly intensity and duration, for instance: someone may be lacking the right word at times, replacing it perhaps with the wrong one or with silence, applying the wrong paralinguistic features, using a facial gesture incongruent with the verbal-paralinguistic expression, failing to use the expected gesture or gaze contact, rapping on the door rather than knocking gently when the latter would be more appropriate, emitting unrefined postural signs in a formal situation, or failing to offer a dinner guest a second helping after a rather small first one. Faulty interactive encoding is a most typical form of this kind of communication problem, as is the deficient encoding that takes place between, for instance, subcultures (e.g. the possible nonverbal communication problems between teachers and students in a multicultural classroom) (e.g. Wolfgang, 1979). Another typical type of faulty encoding, as regards both meaning and form, is what elsewhere (Poyatos, 1984a) I have discussed as 'homonyms-antonyms' and 'antonyms-antonyms' in instances of intercultural interaction in which we do not know that our signs have a meaning other than the one intended. Faulty encoding can be seen clearly illustrated in a triple linguistic-paralinguistic-kinesic transcription, in which absence of signs and irregularities would appear as gaps on the various levels of the notation.

Incorrect encoding, finally, is a voluntary emission of verbal and nonverbal messages which, however, carry an entirely unintended meaning; it goes beyond intermittently faulty

encoding, as we totally or almost totally say and do the wrong things during portions of an encounter or for the length of its duration. As one of my students recently wrote: 'Everyone has had the experience of having something come out all wrong. For example, Premier (...) because of his nervousness in meeting Princess (...), tried to compliment her and it came out sounding more like an insult. This is the case when a person meant to encode one thing, but the message that came across was something entirely different'.

Decoding of the interaction components

If we think of the sociopsychological complexity of daily interaction in which language and its nonverbal cosystems operate between individuals of different age, sex, occupation, socioeducational status, sensitiveness, subculture, culture, and interactive competences and style, we realize the relevance of the various levels of interpretation that are possible at the decoding end of a verbal–nonverbal exchange—which, naturally, may include the whole series of objectual and environmental sign systems, and not only the behavioral ones. Without elaborating on the two basic semiotic possibilities as regards the sign–meaning relationship, that is, *shared decoding* (obviously the ideal situation, whether achieved through identical interpretation of words, gestures, touch, proxemics, or the status-identifying qualities of clothes) and *idiosyncratic decoding* (if the meaning can be correctly interpreted only by its emitter and one or two other persons), four possible decoding situations deserve much attention.

Absent decodability, frequent in social interaction, is simply the result of lack of encoded signs, when there is nothing to be decoded, which corresponds to zero encoding. It happens when the receiver does not recognize that absence of signs, in other words, if he does not even decode that absence as such.

Zero decoding, on the other hand, occurs if the sensible signs that have been encoded are not perceived at all; or if, being perceived, make no sense, that is, are not interpreted. For instance, a Japanese speaker touches the tip of his nose when a Westerner would touch his chest as the typical pronominal language marker for signifying 'I' or 'Me', and his Western listener may not even realize he did that; but maybe he does, and still does not attach any meaning to it, when it was actually part of the triple verbal–paralinguistic–kinesic complex. At the extrasomatic level, many a time a man, for instance, fails to perceive or interpret some of the visual characteristics of a woman's attire (which may have been intentionally encoded), thus failing also to make synesthesial associations. Zero decoding may, of course, refer only to qualifying signs, such as color, shape, intensity of perfume, texture, duration, etc.; which suggests it depends very much on the receiver's degree of sensitivity, in turn developed partly according to his degree of socialization. But, whether the encoded signs are perceived or not, zero decoding is a semiotic blank that occurs much more often than one can imagine or wishes to acknowledge, not only in daily interaction, where so many messages go unnoticed, but in every static manifestation of the arts and the environment. Only the thought that different visually expressed signs in representational and nonrepresentational painting—and those more hidden ones determined by the internal interrelationships of their various elements—escape us should generate enough serious semiotic research that would investigate in depth the less obvious levels of art perception. At the sociopsychological level, to mention a few more perspectives, one should establish the positive and negative aspects of zero decoding in interaction and, within this area, in

the developmental stages of socialization, in the interaction of and with the blind, the deaf, the Down's-Syndrome person, etc.

Zero-sign decoding is closely related to zero decoding but different from it, and it responds to zero encoding if the receiver is aware of the absence of expected signs; for instance, the lack of reply to our 'Who's there?!', or the failure to say 'Thank you' when we expect it; or the situation in which a North American, when a Spanish male or female takes a cigarette pack out without offering him a cigarette, can interpret that behavior as a zero-sign one, (as he should in that culture, where the opposite is expected). Again, we could investigate the positive and negative aspects of zero decoding. For while in some instances one could certainly apply the saying 'What you don't know doesn't hurt you', in others recognizing the absence of signs can certainly make us take the right course of action.

False decoding, finally, may logically correspond to faulty encoding, but it refers mostly to the situations in which the original meaning of the encoded verbal or nonverbal signs is misinterpreted, that is, lost, and replaced by another meaning which was never wittingly encoded by the emitter. For instance, as a Westerner in Tokyo I once misinterpreted a woman's prolonged and rather high-pitched moaning sound coming intermittently from the next room, without realizing it was the Japanese feminine form of feedback while interacting with somebody over the telephone. False decoding is also what happens in the typical 'What did I say?!' situation, when suddenly we realize our listener's negative reaction. And it is, of course, one of the main problems in intercultural-interlinguistic interaction; which, of course, involves the basic triple structure, as misinterpretation occurs at any of its three levels. But, beyond our fundamental communicative complex, false decoding can be generated by our failure to interpret any other type of signs, whether personal (e.g. tear shedding, blushing, silences, perfume, man's lotions, clothes, the seemingly haughty use of a pipe, the way someone knocks on our door, the heaviness of footsteps) or environmental (e.g. a seemingly 'personal' library in relation to its owner and his furniture, or the appearance of a building which is not what we thought it was). Much more should be investigated about false decoding as regards, for example, misinterpretation through synesthetic sensations, and the decoding problems of the deaf and the blind, who miss the acoustic and the visual parts of the triple structure respectively. In fact, the encoding-decoding problems in these two types of interaction would constitute a research project in itself.

Conclusion

The multisystem, multilevel complexity of face-to-face interaction defies by its very nature any form of simplistic analysis focused only on language and its most obvious behaviors. Its limitations and risks have been clearly established. It should be hoped, therefore, that with this model to hand no interaction study, whatever its aims might be, would fail to at least identify its components, their various levels, their possible constructions and the possible communication problems that would otherwise remain hidden.

NOTES

¹ Although a few of these ideas have been only outlined also elsewhere (Poyatos, 1983b, 1984a, 1984b, in press b). I have discussed them in my anthropology and sociology courses on nonverbal communication as well as in lectures for psychology and linguistics departments of several European universities. To both colleagues and students I am grateful for their stimulating interest.

- ² From a semiotic point of view, any signs, regardless of their origin, constitute a *semiotic activity*, although here the term activity is understood only as representing the personal or extrapersonal physical, chemical, dermal and thermal sources. However, the semiotic activity can be said to become such only when those signs are perceived or at least when someone becomes exposed to them.
- ³ I coined and published the term *chronemics* in the early 70s (as analogous to proxemics) as: our conceptualization and handling of time as a biopsychological and cultural element lending specific characteristics to social relationships and to the many events contained within the communicative stream, from linguistic syllables and flitting gestures to meaningful glances and silences.
- ⁴ One of the three most important nonverbal categories, together with 'identifiers' and 'externalizers' (see the model for social interaction research developed in Poyatos [1983b, 1985], inspired by the earlier work of Ekman and Friesen [1969]) is that of language markers: conscious or unconscious kinesic and kinesic-paralinguistic behaviors which punctuate and emphasize the acoustic and grammatical succession of words and phrases according to their location and relevance in the speech stream and coincide with written punctuation symbols (which are grammatical and attitudinal themselves).
- ⁵ These paralinguistic permanent characteristics are the ones I have studied earlier as 'primary qualities' (see an outline of paralanguage in Poyatos (1983b), and the lengthiest study in Poyatos (in press): timbre, resonance, volume, tempo, pitch register, pitch intervals between registers, pitch range, syllabic duration, intonation range, and rhythm.
- ⁶ I first dealt with the theory and methodology of nonverbal communication in foreign-language learning and teaching at a seminar for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (as part of the International Conference on Nonverbal Behavior organized by Aaron Wolfgang in 1983), analyzing the encoding and decoding problems in that type of intercultural interaction (a perspective initiated in Poyatos, 1984a) and suggesting some guidelines as regards presentation of the material and grading, illustration and description, drilling, etc.
- ⁷ Cf. Kendon's (1980) structural analysis of an encounter, in which he refers to 'slots'.

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