Part I

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Introduction

Imagine conversations as the erector set of human relationships: They not only create the foundation and frame on which relationships are built but supply the mortar that binds people together. Effective communication permits the smooth meshing of individuals into relationships while awkward communication weakens and erodes these relationships. In every human context – be it home, work, or play – the role of conversation in the negotiation of human relations cannot be overstated.

So how do people accomplish effective communication? One way is through adapting their interaction patterns to one another. Visualize two dancers, so perfectly synchronized that each partner’s movement is enmeshed with the other’s steps in a fluid and graceful union. When one steps forward the other steps back. They twirl apart then back together. Or one dancer’s move is echoed by the other’s. This coordination may result from the dancers responding to their partner’s actual or anticipated behavior or to both.

Now imagine this same kind of coordination in conversation. People may adapt their communication behavior to one another in a variety of ways. These adaptation patterns undergird human interactions and relationships. Our objectives in this volume are to analyze the nature of these patterns, their possible antecedents and consequences, and their implications for understanding interpersonal communication. In so doing, we will review a broad range of theories that seek to predict and explain interaction patterns, examine the research evidence that has been amassed in their behalf, discuss methodological implications for studying adaptation in interpersonal communication, and present new data that incorporates many of these methodological considerations. We will conclude with our own Interaction Adaptation Theory, which we believe builds upon the soundest principles from previous theories and is responsive to the mounting empirical evidence.
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\section*{THE BASIC PATTERNS}

The patterns to be considered in this book go by many names – adaptive responses, accommodation, interpersonal coordination, matching, mirroring, convergence, reciprocity, mimicry, compensation, divergence, complementarity, synchrony, dissynchrony. Basically, they refer to whether the interaction behaviors of two or more individuals are “non-random, patterned, or synchronized in both timing and form” (Bernieri & Rosenthal, 1991, p. 403) and whether the patterns are similar or dissimilar. For example, if one individual becomes increasingly involved in the conversation, the other may adapt by also becoming more involved or by becoming less involved. Often these patterns are subsumed under the general headings of \textit{mutual influence} or \textit{communication accommodation/nonaccommodation} (see Cappella, 1987; Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991b; Street, 1988). Although “adaptation” and “accommodation” can be used interchangeably, we prefer the former because the latter has special meaning in the context of cognitive information-processing theories and because we do not wish readers to associate our use of the term specifically with Communication Accommodation Theory or with usages implying concessions (e.g., Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991).

An umbrella term for many of these patterns is \textit{behavioral matching}, which refers to one interactant’s behavior being much like another’s. Behaviors can be highly similar or even identical because two interactants begin a conversation that way or because their behaviors \textit{converge} (become increasingly alike) over time (see Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991a). If the behaviors involved are visual ones and are identical in form (e.g., one person’s posture is just like the partner’s), the pattern is called \textit{mirroring}. If the behaviors instead reflect some temporal, rhythmic, and smoothly meshed coordination between interactants, the pattern is called \textit{interactional synchrony} (Bernieri & Rosenthal, 1991; Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1989). Mirroring and synchrony reflect \textit{reciprocity}. To reciprocate, as defined by the \textit{American Heritage Dictionary}, is “to show or feel in response or return,” “to make a return for something given or done,” or “to give or take mutually; to interchange.” As a communication principle this translates into shared expectations that people will respond with the same or similar behaviors to the communication exhibited by another. Another type of reciprocity is \textit{motor mimicry}, in which a person reflexively engages in an empathic behavior (e.g., a wince) that is an appropriate response to the partner’s
current situation and often mimics what the other person is displaying or has displayed during the recounting of an event (Bavelas, Black, Lemery, & Mullett, 1986).

The opposites of matching, mirroring, convergence, synchrony, and reciprocity are complementarity, divergence, dissynchrony, and compensation. Complementarity occurs when “the behaviour of each participant differs from, but complements, that of the other” (Hinde, 1979, p. 79); that is, interactants maintain a dissimilar exchange pattern (Street, 1991). Divergence is moving toward a more dissimilar pattern, so it entails change on at least one person’s part. Dissynchrony, as its name implies, is the opposite of synchrony, a noticeable lack of rhythmic coordination between two interactants’ communication patterns, like striking a discord. Finally, interpersonal compensation (which is distinct from intrapersonal compensation) has been more narrowly defined as a shift in one’s own gaze or proximity in a direction opposite that of the partner (Argyle & Dean, 1965) or more broadly as the exchange of opposite approach and avoidance behaviors: “Compensation results when participants respond with dissimilar behaviours or adapt them in opposite directions” (Street & Cappella, 1985, p. 244).

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERACTION ADAPTATION

Why are these interpersonal patterns so important to study? One reason is that adaptation is an essential, defining feature of interpersonal communication (Cappella, 1991b). Another is that all of these patterns occur with high regularity within conversations. His review of the substantial body of literature on these patterns led Cappella (1981) to conclude:

The one incontrovertible conclusion derived from this review is that mutual influence in expressive behaviors is a pervasive feature of social interaction, found across a variety of behaviors. This pervasiveness extends not only across behaviors but across developmental time. Very young infants, in their 1st weeks of life, and their adult caretakers show the kind of compensatory and reciprocal influences that adults exhibit later. I find such evidence striking testimony to the fundamental nature of mutual influence in human social behavior. One must be awed by the flexible yet patterned responses that social actors make to one another. (p. 123)

Yet a third reason is that these patterns are instrumental in defining and maintaining our interpersonal relationships. Beginning at birth, we
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adapt to caregivers and they to us, and all of our subsequent interpersonal relationships are marked by the ways in which we interact. These interaction patterns generally signify the state of interpersonal relationships (e.g., intimate or nonintimate) and they are critical to the development and maintenance of those relationships. As interaction patterns become habitualized, they can significantly influence relational progress or deterioration. Rubin (1983), for example, in a book aptly titled *Intimate Strangers* characterizes the development of intimacy as a dance of approach and avoidance; if the pulls of avoidance are stronger than the pulls of approach, true intimacy may elude a couple.

Last, our choices of interaction patterns have very real and practical consequences, both for the immediate interaction and for what follows it. Some patterns facilitate smooth, comfortable, and meaningful interaction while others may create cycles of misunderstanding, discomfort, or aggression. Consider the following examples:

- A manager is preparing to visit a new work site. Should she plan to adopt the same informal dress and language as the employees or dress in a suit and use a more formal language style? Which will make her and the employees more comfortable? Which will facilitate her ability to communicate effectively with them? And which will foster their subsequent compliance with her wishes?

- An interrogator wants to determine whether a person being questioned is being truthful or not. Should he be affable and approachable so that his demeanor “disarms” the accused and leads him to be more forthcoming, or should he be intimidating so that the accused becomes submissive and acquiesces to the information requests? Which style will result in greater accuracy in detecting deception?

- A therapist wants a reticent client to become more disclosive. Should she talk a lot, in hopes that the client will respond in kind or should she be silent, in hopes that the client will eventually fill the void by talking? Will one pattern ultimately lead to more successful therapy?

- An applicant for a job is being interviewed by someone who is highly casual in her conversational style. Will he be better liked and increase his probability of being hired if he matches the interviewer’s style or if he maintains a more reserved demeanor?

- A woman wants to extinguish the romantic overtures of a fellow employee. Should she be very distant and disinterested or not? Will her behavior cause him to become even more interested and to pursue
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her more vigorously or will he match her own disinterest and leave her alone?

- A married couple has fallen into a pattern of escalating hostilities and conflict. If the husband now adopts a more appeasing stance in their arguments, will the wife become even more attacking, in response to his submissiveness, or will she also deescalate hostilities? And will the changed interaction pattern affect their satisfaction with, and commitment to, their relationship?

These examples make plain that the types of interaction patterns people enact can influence the immediate success or failure of interpersonal exchanges as well as have extended effects after the interchange is over. They may even have severe and far-reaching macrosocial implications. Consider: Cross-cultural differences in conversational norms may lead to mismatched interaction styles during intercultural encounters. For example, when North Americans want someone to speak up, they often talk louder themselves, hoping for a reciprocity effect. But Middle Easterners think if someone is speaking loudly to them, they are not being deferent enough and so they speak more softly. Several speaking turns between these two may leave the North American shouting and the Middle Easterner mumbling incoherently. Another example: Anglo-American listeners tend to use continuous gaze to signal attentiveness to a speaker, while African-American listeners do so only intermittently and instead use more frequent gaze while talking (Erickson, 1979). This can lead to awkward silences, to Anglo-Americans repeating statements that may appear condescending, and to a generally “out of sync” interaction. (See Burgoon et al., 1989, for additional cross-cultural differences.) The lack of synchronization can give rise to a host of misunderstandings and negative consequences. It is easy to imagine that the ways in which adversaries adopt increasingly similar or dissimilar interaction styles during dispute mediation or collective bargaining may retard or facilitate the prospect of reaching solutions. At a yet more macroscopic level, international conflict can escalate or deescalate through a reciprocal, tit-for-tat pattern of aggressiveness or reciprocal concessions. Thus, an understanding of the nature of different interpersonal interaction patterns may bring greater insights into larger sociopolitical issues.

Perhaps because of their significant ramifications for human communication and human relationships, these kinds of issues have generated prolific research and theorizing about such interaction patterns as matching, accommodation, reciprocity, and compensation. Most of that
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literature has focused on the patterns themselves or on their antecedents. Consequently, our attention will center there as well. In attempting to bring some coherence to this voluminous material, we will give extensive attention to both the conceptual and methodological issues involved in interaction adaptation. We also present new data that simultaneously serve as concrete illustrations of how interaction adaptation can be studied from different methodological vantage points and shed new light on the nature of adaptation patterns. All of this culminates in our own original theory of the factors prompting different interaction patterns. We conclude by returning to the all important issue of postinteractional consequences, in the belief that a fuller understanding of interpersonal adaptation will emerge from considering preinteractional and postinteractional factors in addition to the interaction itself.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

We begin in Chapters 2 through 5 by reviewing the existing theories and research. The issue of interpersonal adaptation has spawned a profusion of theories and lines of inquiry, most of which have concerned the ways in which people manage conversational involvement or intimacy (e.g., Cappella, 1979, 1984, 1991b; Cappella & Planalp, 1981; Kenny & La Voie, 1982; Putnam & Jones, 1982; Ross, Cheyne, & Lollis, 1988; VanLear, 1983). However, some research looks at rhythmic patterns and the extent to which parties synchronize their patterns. Other work considers the circumstances under which people converge toward or diverge from one another in their communication style – language, speech patterns, and the like.

Some excellent summaries already available cover many of the bases (e.g., Andersen, 1985; Andersen & Andersen, 1984; Cappella, 1983; Firestone, 1977; Hale & Burgoon, 1984; Patterson, 1973, 1983; Rosenfeld, 1987; Street & Cappella, 1985). These summaries, however, are neither exhaustive nor current, given the continuing accumulation of research findings that has occurred in the last five years. Our objective is therefore to update and synthesize the various models and their empirical support, with an eye toward ultimately advancing our own model.

A quick perusal of the extant theories and explanations can be bewildering. For example, Aiello (1987), Andersen and Andersen (1984), Hale and Burgoon (1984), and O’Connor and Gifford (1988) have proffered variants on the following classes of theories, all of which are
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discussed in succeeding chapters: (a) reciprocity-based models, (b) intimacy regulation or affiliative conflict theories, (c) expectancy and discrepancy models, (d) arousal-based models, including arousal labeling and arousal valence, (e) functional models, and (f) social cognition or attribution-based models. Others have classified theories according to the types of predictions. Kaplan, Firestone, Klein, and Sodikoff (1983), for example, identified four different types of predictions in the literature: (a) straight reciprocity, in which one person’s behavior is matched by the other’s, (b) compensation, in which one person’s behavior is met with opposite behaviors by the other, (c) attraction mediation, in which people approach each other if their initial attraction is positive and avoid each other if their initial attraction is negative, regardless of what the other does, and (d) attraction transformation, in which people are predicted to reciprocate the approach of attractive others but to compensate the approach of unattractive others. Abele (1986) proposed three alternative predictions specifically for the relationship of gaze to topic intimacy: (a) compensation, in which a person’s gaze compensates for topic intimacy throughout the interaction, (b) adaptation, in which gaze is inversely related to topic intimacy at the beginning of an interaction but differences dissipate by the end of the interaction, and (c) sequencing, in which gaze decreases as partner’s predictability increases over time. Yet others (e.g., Street & Cappella, 1985) have classified theories according to the primary explanatory mechanisms underlying them. This has commonly resulted in three broad classes – arousal models, cognitive models, and functional models.

Gleaned from all of this literature is a potpourri of factors proposed as instigating or controlling adaptation processes, among them:

1. social attraction and similarity (e.g. Lynn, 1978; Wallbott, forthcoming)
2. social exchange and equity principles (e.g., Roloff & Campion, 1985)
3. norms and obligations (e.g., La Gaipa, 1977; Lynn, 1978)
4. modeling (e.g., Hosman & Tardy, 1980)
5. motor mimicry (e.g., Bavelas, Black, Lemery, & Mullett, 1986)
6. synchrony (e.g., Bullowa, 1975)
7. social control motivations (e.g., Patterson, 1983)
8. self-presentation concerns (e.g., Shaffer & Tomarelli, 1989)
9. attributions of intent (e.g., Street & Cappella, 1985)
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10. cognitive biases (e.g., La Gaipa, 1977)
11. reinforcement (e.g., La Gaipa, 1977)
12. individual differences in intimacy predispositions, personality, mood, emotional state, social refractory state, etc. (e.g., Kaplan, 1977)
13. environmental definitions and constraints (e.g., Kaplan, 1977)
14. interaction functions and goals (e.g., Snyder, 1992)
15. relational definitions and stage (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973)
16. frame attunement (e.g., Kendon, 1990)

Given the diversity of theories and explanations that have been advanced and the disciplines from which they derive (psychology, communication, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, psychiatry), it is perhaps unsurprising that no single theory has yet emerged as conceptually superior. Empirical efforts to conduct “critical tests” pitting various theories against each other (e.g., Abele, 1986; Hale & Burgoon, 1984; Kaplan et al., 1983; Lynn, 1978) have likewise failed to produce a “winner.” When we first approached this literature, then, our intent was to analyze more deeply the assumptions underlying each theory, to identify explicitly each theory’s key premises, and to assess the extent of empirical support for each. Our present intent in summarizing this literature is to trace the important lines of thought and inquiry that have been foundational to the extent knowledge about interpersonal adaptation and to extract from each what seem to be the most valid principles. In turn, these principles will be incorporated in the new model we are advancing.

There are numerous ways this material could be organized. The organizational framework we shall follow is our own. Because we come to this body of literature from a communication perspective, it is useful for us to consider the degree to which various models incorporate communication principles and treat interaction patterns as intentional, symbolic activities. Many of the theorists whose work we will cite might disagree with where we have placed their contribution. Our aim is heuristic rather than organizational hegemony. Accordingly, we believe the different models and theories can be arrayed along a continuum ranging from, at one extreme, what can be variously labeled as reactive, automatic, nonsymbolic, and/or indicative behavior to, at the other extreme, communicative, mindful, intentional, and/or symbolic behavior. This arrangement is depicted in Figure 1.1.

Without belaboring all that the different terms imply, let it suffice to
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I. BIOLOGICAL MODELS
   (based on comfort needs, safety, bonding, social organization, universal processes)
   Interactional Synchrony
   Motor Mimicry and Mirroring

II. AROUSAL AND AFFECT MODELS
    (addition of psychological needs to above factors)
    Affiliative Conflict Theory
    Arousal-Labeling Theory
    Bidimensional Model
    Discrepancy-Arousal Theory
    Dialectical Models

III. SOCIAL NORM MODELS
     (incorporation of cultural, societal factors, ingroup-outgroup relations)
     Norm of Reciprocity
     Social Exchange and Resource Exchange Theories
     The Dyadic Effect
     Communication Accommodation Theory

IV. COMMUNICATION AND COGNITION MODELS
    (emphasis on functions, goals, meanings, perceptions, attributions)
    Sequential-Functional Model
    Expectancy Violations Theory
    Cognitive-Valence Theory
    Motor Mimicry Revisited (Bavelas et al.)

Figure 1.1 Hierarchical arrangement of theories.