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The Role of Hand Gestures in Emotion Communication

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Abstract

Previous research suggests that humans use multimodal information during emotional communication. Only a few studies have investigated how emotional information is presented in non-verbal channels. We examined the role of hand gestures in communicating emotions. In a between-subject design, we analyzed the size, frequency, and type of gestures under encouraged and spontaneous gesturing conditions. Participants (N=36) were asked to describe narratives with emotional content. Preliminary analyses with 18 individuals show that, interestingly, gesture frequencies and gesture use with specific emotional phrases did not differ between groups. Also, there was not a significant difference between the two groups in the types of gestures they produced. However, the gestures in the encouraged condition were significantly bigger in size compared to gestures in the spontaneous condition. These diverse preliminary results suggest that people's hand gestures during emotional communication should be investigated with all their dimensions instead of focusing on one aspect.