

Popular television and cultural behavior: Mexican-Spanish and Iraqi-Gulf Arabic

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We believe that the study of dramatic interpretations of dyadic interaction is beneficial to the analysis of natural multimodal social interaction. Here we focus on nonverbal behaviors that listeners in such interactions perform and on aspects of spoken language that vary from region to region. We observed interactive narrative discourse from native speakers, who had not spent significant time outside of their countries of origin, from two language/cultural groups: Gulf-regional Arabic and Mexican Spanish. We compared acted *versus* unrehearsed listener nonverbal behavior in both groups focusing on listener participants in the interactions. The data on acted dialogs comprised recently produced soap operas, currently being aired in and outside Mexico and Iraq. These we compared to samples of unrehearsed, natural storytelling among members of the respective cultures, elicited using Wallace Chafe's 1980 *Pearl Film*. Comparing acted with natural dialog we found them to be dialectically related phenomena. These two discourses mutually constitute elements of one another in nonverbal behavior, both on screen and in 'real' life. For example, Mexican actors in telenovelas embody very staid facial expressions as listeners. This feature of behavior was also observed in a majority of the twenty seven Mexican-Spanish dyadic interactions that were elicited. As listeners, Iraqi actors in a popular miniseries exaggerate "*brow lowerers*" ("Action Unit 4", Ekman & Friesen, 1978), a nonverbal behavior observed in subtler forms in our thirty six Iraqi-Arabic dyadic pairs.

The proliferation of Mexican and Iraqi drama through global media, like satellite television and internet sites like *youtube*, works to reinforce cultural identities domestically with a national audience and internationally with satellite cultural pockets of people who identify as Mexican or Iraqi. The future implications of this phenomenon and our findings are that we may see increasing uniformity in speech and nonverbal behavior between people across vastly different geographical regions. Our next step would be to examine the nonverbal behavior of those who have spent significant time in a different cultural milieu, other than Mexico and Iraq, in comparison with acted speech and listener behaviors from the same television shows.

Selected references

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