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Audience tuning effects in the context of situated and embodied processes

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This review provides an overview of the research on communication and the 'Saying is Believing' paradigm in the context of different perspectives on communication. The process of 'audience tuning' is shaped by a variety of situated factors in contexts that affect the communicators' confidence in their message. The overwhelming common denominator is that the combination of features that create ambiguity yields the optimal condition for the formation of shared realities. I conclude with an argument that the implied invariance of memory processes in shared reality work needs to be more attentive to the regulatory function of memories driving the expression of shared realities.

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A precondition for any species that are adapted to group living is the necessity of a common notation system that puts them on a comparable footing thereby giving them partial mutual access to each other's internal states. A *common or symmetrical notation system* serves the function of coupling an agent with another in a two-way interaction, making it possible for them to 'communicate' [1,2]. Such a system is a simplification of what makes communication work as it involves a kaleidoscopic range of facets that are synchronously co-active in the process of mutually constructing a shared cognitive representation. An important facet of the features are the modalities (e.g., acoustic, visual, olfactory, movement), the media carried by these modalities (e.g., language, chemosignals) as well as the socially situated contexts within which communication takes place, which altogether proffer a range of perspectives from which one can analyze the process of communication. Within these diverse but synchronized range of perspectives on communication, a 'shared reality' approach occupies a special position, namely a focus on the creation of situated shared representations about some aspect of social reality. In other words, shared reality is achieved through interpersonal communication, and facilitates the formation of shared beliefs about a range of personally and interpersonally significant epistemic needs [3••,4,5•,6,7].

The following consists of three parts. In the first, brief part, I narrow down what is to be understood with communication when one is focusing on interpersonal communication in the shared reality context in contrast to the different processes that ground communication per se. In the second part, I focus on the research that has contributed to the understanding of interpersonal communication from a shared reality perspective. In the concluding part, I highlight issues that research on the creation of shared reality (audience tuning) through interpersonal communication may find useful in advancing research and theorizing in this field.

Communication versus interpersonal communication in the case of shared reality

A general requirement for any successful communication is the recruitment of a medium shared by producer and perceiver (production and perception) by means of which producer and receiver are put on the same footing (see [8,9]). Human communication deploys multiple modalities and has to synchronize on these modalities to achieve *equivalence or parity* between *a sender and receiver*, namely visual, auditory, tactile, or chemical senses [2,10]. However, research attempting to answer the question of human communication from a social psychological perspective has focused primarily on language as the medium in the service of establishing parity between interactants by means of transmitting 'representations' in interpersonal communication (see [11,12]). A recurrent theme has to do with the different ways in which 'representational correspondence' can be established, for instance, in joint action. This theme has been approached from a variety of angles. Thus, 'audience design' (see [11,12]), 'referential communication' [13,14], and 'grounding' [15–17] are some of the converging approaches about how representational correspondence between the members to a 'dialogue' is achieved.

So, what is distinctive about shared reality? It is regarded as '. . . the product of the motivated process of experiencing with others a *personal connection and commonality of inner states* (judgements, beliefs, feelings, attitudes) about some target (e.g., perceiving that you and someone else have the same evaluation of a target person)' ([3••], p. 2, emphasis here). Thus, it is about the convergent representation of a subject, not merely in terms of content but also in terms of evaluation and experience. This convergent representation is an intersubjectively experienced reality, and as a shared one it is regarded as serving fundamental human needs such as connecting to others and having a confident understanding of the world, which are both served by interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication from a shared reality perspective

The research on interpersonal communication and shared reality is based on Higgins and Rholes' [18] classic study published under the catchy title 'Saying is Believing'. This research relied on giving participants evaluatively ambiguous information about a target person, who were then asked to describe this person to an audience that was familiar with the target and held a positive (negative) opinion of him. The same information could be represented positively or negatively (bold or reckless). Participants were asked to recall the original information about the target after having described the target person to the audience. An analysis of the recall data revealed that those who had communicated to an audience that had a positive (negative) opinion distorted the behaviors they recalled, matching the evaluative tone of their audience-tuned message. The significance of the communicative act was underlined by the absence of any such bias in the condition where the participants did not have to produce a message to an audience whose opinion they were made aware of ([18], see also [19]).

The significance of audience tuning is assumed to contribute to the maximization of epistemic and relational-connectedness goals driving the shared reality creation need (e.g., [3••,20•]). More recently, it has been suggested to change the 'Saying is Believing' metaphor because mere verbal descriptions that do not involve audience tuning also reveal a similar effect on free recall tests [21–23]. Consequently, referring to this paradigm as 'audience-tuning memory bias' is deemed more appropriate and makes it clear that the phenomenon is a clearly a communication driven one.

During the last ten years, research on this phenomenon has systematically examined the different factors controlling the situated features of the communication situation, in particular the features of different sources that can contribute to the communicator's confidence about topic relevant judgments and evaluations (see [3••]). One important source that can modulate the communicators judgment is inherent to the communicator's confidence regarding their assessment of the target. The original paradigm used an explicitly ambiguous target description and if the initial information is ambiguous then audience tuning effects are more likely to be manifested (e.g., [24]). However, audience tuning effects will be reduced to the extent that the communicator is confident about their assessment of a target. Another feature contributing to the tuning effect is the modality in which a message is represented (e.g., if the text message is a visual one or a text [25]). The demonstration of the audience tuning effect is, in fact, a function of how ambiguous or unambiguous the information contained in the target representation is, irrespective of modality in which it is presented. This principle also applies to the evaluative potential of an event. When the information about an event does not allow evaluative conclusions then tuning effects are more likely to be manifested, compared to when clear-cut evaluative conclusions are part of the original stimulus material (e.g., [26]). In short, degree of ambiguity is an important contributor to tuning effects. An interesting question in this context is if shared reality generalizes to other targets. Research by Bebermeier *et al.* [27] shows that such generalization takes place depending on the perceived commonality with the audience, recollection of shared reality at time of judgment, and similarity between new and initial targets.

Indeed, perceived communality with the audience, or the interface between audience characteristics and the communicator is a contributor to shared reality construction. One such important factor is the social category membership of communicator and audience. As one would predict, same social category membership of communicator and audience is more likely to lead to audience-tuning (e.g., [28]). However, when category membership is not shared (e.g., outgroups) then audience tuning is unlikely to take place and if it does, then it is for goals such as compliance, conversational rules rather than the establishment of a shared reality. Indeed, in such cases, tuning effects do not shape the communicator's evaluative representation of the target. The expertise an audience may have is a further factor that shapes tuning effects which is the result of a match between the topic and the expertise of an audience (e.g., [28]). Among other variables, audience size has been an important factor, and data revealed that when the audience size was 3 then irrespective of whether the message was delivered or not, audience effects emerged, but with a 1 person audience the tuning effect was observed only when the audience was assumed to have received the message but not when not (e.g., [28]). Thus, the 1 person audience replicated an earlier finding reported by Higgins and Rholes [18]. However, these findings appear to be consistent with research by Booth *et al.* [29], who show that sharing an experience with another person, without communicating, amplifies one's experience. The argument is that sharing an experience with another person amplifies one's experience

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