"Are You Kidding Me?": The Role of Nonverbal Cues in the Verbal Accounting Process

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This article reports on an investigation of 78 interactions for the messages sent by nonverbal cues in account sequences. Account elicitations and evaluations were rated based on vocal and facial behaviors communicating five messages: (a) positive or negative affect, (b) certainty or uncertainty, (c) understanding or confusion, (d) agreement or disagreement, and (e) belief or disbelief. We also coded the accounters' discourse that followed elicitations and evaluations to investigate the relationship between nonverbal messages and the account forms used by the teller. Our results showed that, even when controlling for what a person said, the messages sent by nonverbal cues could all predict subsequent account forms, although not always in the way expected. These results help our argument that nonverbal cues may be an important part of moving through account sequences, both on their own and when combined with verbal utterances.

As people engage with others, they often need to explain their current or past behaviors. Public explanations are typically referred to as accounts (e.g., Scott & Lyman, 1968), and accounts or "offerings" (Goffman, 1967) may take a range of verbal forms including excuses ("I couldn't help it."), justifications ("It wasn't that important."), and denials ("I didn't do it."). These account types are typically distinguished from one another based on their placement on a continuum reflecting the degree to which they are mitigating (less severe) or aggravating (more severe) modes of discourse (Brown & Levinson, 1987; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983).

Account forms usually occur within a larger sequence of language moves, and previous research has found that the parts of account sequences (e.g., elicitations and evaluations of the account) are typically linked with and help predict other moves in the accounting sequence (Buttny, 1993). Much of this interconnection is

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based on the mitigating or aggravating nature of the utterances, and conversational moves are likely to follow the emotional tenor (mitigating or aggravating) of the previous utterance. So, if a person makes an accusation—an aggravating elicitation form—the other is likely to provide an aggravating account (e.g., denying that there was an offense to explain; Manusov, Cody, Donohue, & Zappa, 1994). Mitigating or aggravating evaluations also tend to follow from similarly valenced forms of accounts (e.g., the denial above would likely be met with rejection of the account; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983).

The influence of the types of accounting moves on subsequent speaking turns suggests that accounting behavior is part of a larger interaction process, whereby the other parties who are the audience for or listeners[1] to the account also play a role in shaping the explanation itself through a sequence of accounting events (e.g., Buttny, 1987; Manusov, 1996). Indeed, an important feature of all conversation is the *listening turn* or what the other party to an interaction does while the primary speaker is engaged in talk. Delineation of a listening turn

> is intended to highlight the active rather than the passive role of the listener—a point often missed by researchers, partly because of the habit of focusing on an individual rather than the dyad or group as the unit of analysis. (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996, p. 346)

This view of listeners is consistent with the perspective of many discourse researchers who argue that a model of dialogue as a joint activity most accurately reflects interaction processes (e.g., Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000).

A focus on the listener's role in accounting is important for more than its primacy in understanding discourse as a collaborative activity. In interaction, listeners typically rely on nonverbal cues to shape the ongoing interaction (Burgoon et al., 1996). Despite the importance of nonverbal cues to conversation, however, the ways in which nonverbal cues may work within account sequences to affect speakers' choices of verbal forms have not been investigated systematically. It is thus the goal of this investigation to assess some of the means by which nonverbal cues work within verbal accounting sequences. In doing so, we believe that accounting, like other communication processes, will be seen more accurately as comprised of multiple communicative behaviors enacted by multiple interactants (Bavelas & Chovil, 2000; Trees & Manusov, 1998).

Nonverbal Cues in the Accounting Process

Although accounting has been studied as a primarily verbal process, nonverbal cues have been mentioned briefly as important parts of explanatory processes.

[1] For this paper, we have chosen to refer to the person eliciting and responding to another's account as the listener. We realize the problematic nature of this choice in terms of transactional views of communication, but we believe it is the best choice given our focus on interactants' roles other than that of the account provider.

Typically, accounts research that includes nonverbal cues frames them as a substitute for verbal codes. Researchers focusing on account sequences have found that a "telling" often requires a failure event, an elicitation of an account, the account or response to an elicitation, and an evaluation of the account (Buttny, 1987; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; Schönbach, 1980).

Within this sequence, elicitations have been most commonly seen as the place in accounting where nonverbal may substitute for verbal cues. Account elicitations are conversational moves indicating that the other has done something unexpected or inappropriate, and typologies of elicitation behaviors typically focus on verbal reproaches (e.g., projected concessions). McLaughlin, Cody, and O'Hair (1983) noted, however, that expressions of surprise or disgust about a failure event might act as an account elicitation. Surprise and disgust are often communicated nonverbally (i.e., through raised eyebrows, inflected monosyllables). Similarly, McLaughlin and her colleagues found that silence—an important nonverbal, vocalic cue that can create meaning in interactions (Umiker-Sebeok, 1980)—is also used to elicit accounts (or can substitute for an account). McLaughlin, Cody, and O'Hair assumed that these nonverbal means of eliciting accounts were more mitigating than many verbal reproach types, and thus they would be likely to lead to a more mitigating account form (e.g., an excuse or an apology).

Similar to elicitations, the evaluation stage involves judgments concerning the acceptability of the account. Indeed, the literature on account sequences typically frames the listener's role as an evaluative one (i.e., assessing the goodness or badness of a behavior, noting the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of an account). Although nonverbal cues may serve in place of verbal elicitations as McLaughlin et al. suggested, nonverbal communication likely plays a role in the accounting process in other ways as well. A listener's nonverbal responses during the account, for example, may indicate the nature of the evaluation even before his or her verbal evaluation begins. As well, nonverbal cues co-occurring with verbal moves may add to or clarify the listener's judgment of the behavior or account.[2] Listeners' nonverbal behaviors, which may be more or less aggravating, should therefore shape the accounting choices that follow. Specifically, McLaughlin et al.'s reasoning suggests that the more mitigating the evaluation performed nonverbally, the more likely the other would be to respond with a positive continuation of the account sequence.

Given the potentially evaluative nature of both elicitations and evaluations in the account sequence, our study focuses on nonverbal cues that may communicate judgment-oriented messages provided by listeners during those two parts of the account sequence. Because few nonverbal behaviors have thus far been investigated within the account sequence, however, it makes sense to look toward related literatures to determine the type and nature of nonverbal behaviors likely

[2] Consistent with the expectation that nonverbal cues may play an important evaluative role in account sequences, Trees and Manusov (1998) found that more mitigating nonverbal behaviors (e.g., raised eyebrows, pleasant facial expressions, closer gestures, more direct body orientation, touch, and softer volume) were related to judgments of greater politeness in friends' use of criticism.

to emerge in account sequences. We draw from three interrelated literatures—nonverbal affect or attitude, feedback, and backchannels—to determine the nature of the behaviors and the messages involved in listener evaluations. Our hope is that relying on these other literatures will point toward a systematic means of investigating nonverbal cues as part of the accounting process.

Attitudes and Affect

One of the ways in which people may show another that an account needs to be offered, or that an account is evaluated positively or negatively, is through nonverbal expressions of the listener's attitude toward the speaker's utterance or action. In support of this, Argyle, Alkema, and Gilmour (1971) noted the primacy of nonverbal cues for communicating friendly, neutral, and hostile attitudes. Chovil and Fridlund (1991) also stated that nonverbal cues, particularly facial behaviors, are likely to emit messages "about attitudes, opinions, affirmations, ruminations" (p. 165). Attitudes are commonly referred to in the nonverbal communication literature as *general affect,* and this is our preferred term here.[3]

Vocal and facial cues are particularly important in communicating affective messages (Ekman, 1993; Frick, 1985). Gottman, Markman, and Notarius (1977), for example, developed a coding scheme for marital affect that includes both vocal and facial cues, reflecting positive or negative attitudes. Positive facial cues include smiles, head nods, eye contact, and empathic facial expressions. Negative facial cues include frowns, sneers, and crying as well as more global facial expressions of fear, anger, and disgust. Vocal cues in their coding scheme primarily refer to tonal qualities (i.e., warm, blaming). Other researchers have identified smiles, frowns, brow movement, facial pleasantness and expressiveness, positive reinforcers, eye gaze, vocal pitch, laughing, volume, speech rate, and vocal variety as cues that communicate affect (Ho & Mitchell, 1982; Kimble, Forte, & Yoshikawa, 1981; Lochman & Allen, 1981; Smith & Scott, 1997).

Speakers and listeners may express positive or negative affect by using valenced cues that show an affective evaluation of the topic or of the other (Pasupathi, Carstensen, Levenson, & Gottman, 1999), and such evaluations are likely to influence the form of account provided. For example, if a listener's response to an account (e.g., "I'm sure that is what you intended") is accompanied by a direct gaze and a blaming tone of voice (possible reflections of negative affect toward the content of the offering), the speaker may respond by shifting his or her approach and providing a different account.

The contention that valenced or evaluative nonverbal, particularly facial and vocal, behaviors help shape the accounting process is consistent with the premise that account sequences fall on a continuum from more mitigating (positive affect) to more aggravating (negative affect) in nature (McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983). As more aggravating verbal elicitations have been found to promote more aggravating accounts, and more mitigating accounts tend to elicit more mitigating ver-

[3] In support of this, Streeck and Knapp (1992) found that facial expressions used by speakers are more likely to "qualify utterance meaning" (p. 17) by sending general affect than to send messages about a *particular* emotion (e.g., surprise).

bal evaluations (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985), we would expect that nonverbal affect will influence subsequent verbal accounting processes in similar ways. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

> H1: More positive facial and vocal affect cues by listeners during elicitations and evaluations will predict the use of more mitigating account forms by account providers; whereas more negative facial and vocal affect cues by listeners during elicitations and evaluations will predict the use of more aggravating account forms by account providers.

Feedback

When the nonverbal reflections of affect discussed above occur specifically as a response to what an accounter is offering, the cues provide feedback to the speaker. According to Leathers (1979), feedback includes both verbal and nonverbal actions that are embedded within a larger frame of actions (i.e., feedback is responsive to something and responded to by someone) and are used to provide information to a speaker about his or her utterances. Interestingly, vocal and facial cues emerge as central in the feedback literature as well as that on affect. Chovil and Fridlund (1991), for example, found that nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, are often used by listeners as a form of feedback. Chovil (1991/1992) identified combinations of brow and mouth movements that constitute speaker or listener reaction displays, providing a "comment" on what is being said. Langer and Wurf (1999) also suggest that positive nonverbal feedback comments include frequent smiling and a pleasant upbeat tone of voice, whereas negative feedback may consist of frowning and a loud, harsh tone of voice.

Affect is not the only form of feedback possible in an accounting sequence, however. Leathers (1979) created the Nonverbal Feedback Rating Instrument to categorize types of feedback cues. In addition to the category of emotionalism, which is consistent with messages of affect, Leathers also discussed nonverbal assurances as a form of feedback (i.e., if the listener's behaviors reflect that the hearer is uncertain and confused, the feedback offers a lack of assurance; when the listener appears nonverbally to understand the other's utterances, the listener's feedback counts as an assurance). Although little research has identified the nonverbal means of showing uncertainty or understanding, Smith and Scott (1997) did note that raising eyebrows, a part of facial expressions, could communicate uncertainty.

Just as affect may influence how accounters act during discussion of a failure event, nonverbal expressions of uncertainty or confusion during account elicitations may appear to challenge the accounter and thus are more likely to precede aggravating accounts. In terms of the evaluation of the account, expressions of certainty or understanding may encourage the speaker to continue with the nature of accounting already provided, and these accounts are likely to be more mitigating. Manusov (1996), for example, found that when a listener's verbal behavior showed that the account made sense, it encouraged people to use the same (mitigating) accounts in subsequent interactions. This evidence leads to our second hypothesis:

H2: Greater (a) certainty and (b) understanding expressed through listeners' facial and vocal cues during account elicitations and evaluations will predict the use of more mitigating account forms by account providers; whereas greater (a) uncertainty and (b) confusion expressed through listeners' facial and vocal cues during account elicitations and evaluations will predict the use of more aggravating account forms by account providers

Backchannels

Andersen (1999) defined *backchannels* as "behaviors [that] provide feedback and [sometimes] encouragement to the speaker, often signaling her or him to continue speaking" (p. 201). Like the other two areas from which the connections between nonverbal cues and accounting can be drawn, facial and vocal cues again seem particularly pertinent. Gardner (1998), for example, focused on the importance of vocal cues. Importantly, Gardner demonstrated that vocal backchannel behaviors reflect not only encouragement to continue the speaking turn, but also an assessment of what is being said (i.e., level of agreement or disagreement with what is being said, as well as the listener's acceptance of or disbelief regarding the speaker's offering).

Backchannel cues may include smiles, vocal responses, head nodding, brow movements, and other facial expressions (Brunner, 1979; Duncan, 1972; Ekman, 1979). Listeners may express disagreement specifically through shaking their head, rolling their eyes, and smirking (Seiter, 1999). Rosenfeld and Hancks (1980) found that observer judgments of listener agreement were related to "normal acknowledgment" behaviors (e.g., head nods) and "interest" behaviors (e.g., visual attention, eyebrow raises) at the beginning of the listener's response. Chovil (1991/1992) and Ekman (1979) also refer to facial expressions that show lack of acceptance or disbelief.

As with affect and feedback, backchannel behaviors allow listeners to influence speakers' behavior primarily by showing their dis/agreement with or dis/belief about the failure event or the account. For instance, nonverbal messages showing disbelief regarding a failure event (e.g., a look of incredulity or facial expression that says, "Are you kidding me?") may encourage the account provider to offer a more aggravating form of account than when a verbal elicitation co-occurs with nonverbal cues that reflect agreement, acceptance, or both. Even more notably, evaluations that show nonverbal agreement, or acceptance, may be more likely to end the accounting (i.e., through a concession) or to lead to a repetition or elaboration of the same account than will nonverbal messages of disagreement or disbelief. Like verbal challenges to or nonhonoring of accounts (e.g., Manusov, 1996; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983), nonverbal backchannels reflecting disagreement or disbelief may serve as a nonverbal challenge, prompting the accounter to use a more aggravating response. This potential tie between backchannels and accounting leads to our third hypothesis:

H3: Greater (a) agreement and (b) belief or acceptance expressed through listeners' facial and vocal cues during account elicitations and evaluations will predict the use of more mitigating account forms by account providers or

elaboration on the original account, whereas greater (a) disagreement and (b) disbelief expressed through listeners' facial and vocal cues during account elicitations and evaluations will predict the use of more aggravating account forms by account providers.

Method

Participants

Participants (N = 166) in this study were recruited from several sections of communication courses at a large university in the northwestern U.S. They were asked to sign up with a friend or next to an empty space (or one completed by a stranger) for a study on "everyday talk." We included both kinds of pairing to increase the generalizability of our study. The 78 pairs included 37 stranger pairs and 41 friend pairs (including one dating pair); the modal response, from [1] *acquaintances* to [5] *best friends*, was [3] "friends"; the median length of time the friends had known one another was 12 months). The participants' average age was 20 (SD = 2.98, range 17 to 40), and 63% of the sample was female. Eighteen of the pairs were male-male, 38 were female-female, and 22 were female-male. Ethnicity was self-labeled as 58% Caucasian, 6% African American, 2% Hispanic, 3% mixed ethnicities, and 17% Asian or Asian American. The remaining participants did not identify their ethnicity. Thirty-one different majors (including undeclared) were represented in the sample.

Procedures

At their assigned times, participants came to our research laboratories. After signing consent forms, individuals were assigned titles (A or B) depending on their orientation to the research assistant (her left or right). Each participant went to a separate room to complete questionnaires; once there, however, the Bs were asked to become confederates in the study. They were told that their role was to get the other to talk about a failure event. If the other brought up the event on his or her own, the confederate did not have to search for a topic. If no failure event was discussed, the confederate was to find some way for it to become a part of the conversation. Further information on the directions to participants can be found in Manusov, Trees, Reddick, Carillo Rowe, and Easley (1998) and in Manusov, Koenig, and Trees (2001).

Once the Bs were clear on what they would be doing and their partners had completed an initial demographic questionnaire, each pair was brought to the filming room and asked to talk for 10 minutes while being videotaped. The partners were given some possible topics to discuss (classes and dating) and were told that the project was designed to understand how people talk to one another. From behind a one-way mirror, the camera operator noted when in the conversation the failure event was discussed. These points were confirmed later with the participants and guided the transcription and coding-rating process. Both participants also completed other questionnaires, including the Bs' demographic data, and were debriefed.

Coding and Rating of Videotapes

Verbal codes. Using the transcripts of the account sequences, the researchers first identified the primary account provided by the speaker and then discerned the verbal (in most cases) utterance that followed the listener's nonverbal evaluation. Verbal accounts and responses to listeners' nonverbal evaluations were coded based on work by Schönbach (1980; Schönbach & Kleibaumhuter, 1990), Hamilton and Hagiwara (1992), McLaughlin, Cody, and O'Hair (1983), and Manusov (Manusov et al., 1994; Manusov et al., 2001). The codes and their descriptions are listed in Table 1 and are placed in order from more mitigating to more aggravating.

Reliability assessments were made on the following: (a) determining what part of the account sequence included the elicitation, primary account, evaluation, and vocalization following the evaluation (unitizing reliability); and (b) the categorization of the speakers' initial accounts and the accounts following the evaluations (intercoder reliability). The overall unitizing reliability was 98%, and kappa reliabilities for the use of particular account codes ranged from .80 to .92.

Nonverbal ratings. Most researchers argue that people are often more likely to use a composite of behaviors that together send a larger message (i.e., global judgments concerning nonverbal expressions of valence) rather than individual cues (Burgoon et al., 1996). For our analyses, then, we focused on the *messages* sent by vocalic and facial cues as suggested by the research reviewed earlier in the paper (e.g., degree of affect, confusion). We created 5-point semantic differential scales for each message and applied them to the listeners' behaviors at two points in the interaction: (a) just prior to the original account (the elicitation), and (b) during and immediately following the account (the evaluation). The scales were as follows: *negative affect* (1) to *positive affect* (5); *uncertainty* (1) to *certainty* (5); *confusion* (1) to *understanding* (5); *disagreement* (1) to *agreement* (5); and *disbelief* (1) to *belief/acceptance* (5).

Each of the ratings was applied separately to the messages sent by vocal and by facial cues. Facial cues were rated with the sound turned down, whereas vocal qualities were rated as they co-occurred with verbal messages. In the interactions studied for this project, affect was shown largely through smiling and vocal warmth and pleasantness. Degree of certainty was often expressed in head nodding (high certainty) and brow lowering (low certainty), as well as vocal smoothness (high certainty) and a questioning tone (low certainty). Likewise, confusion (or understanding) was enacted with nodding, vocal backchannels (i.e., "uh huh"), and tilted head. Disagreement was also reflected in vocal tone, abrupt shifts in tone or speech, and chins toward chest. Finally, disbelief was often communicated with sarcastic tone, brow raises, and volume. Interrater reliabilities were assessed with Cronbach's alpha on a set of 16 ratings done by both researchers. The reliabilities were acceptable and ranged from .76 for facial disbelief to .86 for facial certainty.

Given that what was said verbally by the "listener" may also influence the subsequent account form, we also rated the listeners' verbal elicitations and evaluations for the degree to which they were (1) *aggravating* to (5) *mitigating*. More aggravating elicitations or evaluations attacked or challenged the behavior or account, containing a negative tone. More mitigating moves included more positive verbal affect to minimize the challenge in the words and honored or accepted the

Table 1. Types of Possible Accounters' Vocalizations Following Listeners' Elicitations and Evaluations

Apology - statement that accounter is sorry for the failure (*n* = 0, 0)[b]

Concession - acknowledgment of failure event and accounter's role in it, without an accompanying excuse (*n* = 14, 2)[a]

Internal excuse - a concession that puts blame on one's self for the failure, for example, "I didn't study enough" (*n* = 13, 3)

Silence – no verbal response (*n* = 0, 1)[b]

Facework – attempts to promote a positive image of self following the event without concessions or excuses; for example, "Well, I will do extra credit and try to do better next time to make up for this" (*n* = 4, 8)

Elaboration of earlier offering – situation in which accounters keep talking about what they said in their account with no change in account form or offering (*n* = 0, 31)[c]

External excuses – statement that places blame on factors beyond one's self, for example, "The teacher made an unfair exam" (*n* = 35, 15)

General information – information that does not provide a relevant explanation (*n* = 0, 2)[b]

Justification – acceptance that failure occurred but that it was unimportant, for example, "Yeah, I failed the test, but it was only worth 5% of my grade" (*n* = 5, 7)

Laughter without other verbal follow-up (*n* = 0, 1)[b]

Change of topic – speaker immediately goes on to talk about something else (*n* = 0, 2)[b]

Refusals/takes issue – speaker rejects that failure occurred or rejects others' projection of why the event occurred, but does not really offer an account (*n* = 6, 4)

Reciprocal reproaches – speaker does not respond to the other's request to talk about the failure; instead responds by reproaching the listener for the latter's failure of some sort (*n* = 1, 1)[b]

[a] The first *n* represents the frequency of this code for the account following the elicitation, and the second *n* represents the frequency of the code for the account following the evaluation.

[b] These codes were left out of the analysis because they occurred so infrequently.

[c] Elaboration was not included as a code for the initial accounts, as it did not occur as a first account in any of the interactions.

account. For example, an open-ended question might be more aggravating or challenging (e.g., "Why do you freak out so much?"), relatively neutral without a clear valence (e.g., "How come?"), or more mitigating or positive (e.g., "Why don't you think you did well on it?"). The rating was done on the transcripts by a rater who had not watched the videotapes and was therefore unaffected by the nonverbal codes in the videotape versions. A second rater used the same scale to judge

16 of the interactions for a reliability check. Interrater reliability was .98 for elicitations and .85 for evaluations.

Results

Each of the hypotheses was tested using logistic regression, which allows for the prediction of "a discrete outcome such as group membership from a set of variables that might be continuous, discrete, autonomous, or a mix" (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996, p. 575). To enable us to perform the analyses, each of the account forms needed to be turned into a dichotomous variable, which acted as the dependent measure. Thus, new variables were created for each of the account forms with adequate cell sizes (see Table 1). Each pair of participants received a score for each of the account types following the nonverbal elicitation, and each was also given a series of scores for the account type that came after the nonverbal evaluation. Thus, if one person provided a concession for his or her first account, the speaker received a 1 for that variable but a 0 for all other account forms or variables. If his or her account that followed the listener's evaluation was an external excuse, the speaker received a 1 for the external excuse variable but a 0 for all of the other account types. This allowed us to look for the relationship between the presence or absence of each account type and the nonverbal cues relevant to the hypothesis.

Each logistic regression was performed in two stages. Because we wanted to see the unique contribution of nonverbal messages on account forms but were aware that what was said was also likely to be important, the rating for the verbal form (if any) provided by the listener was entered at the first step. Following the elimination of variance accounted for by the spoken utterance and any shared variance with the nonverbal cues, we performed a stepwise regression with the nonverbal variables relevant to that hypothesis. This allowed us to control statistically for the effects of language by removing those effects and any variance language shared with the nonverbal cues, from the equation prior to measuring the relationship between the listeners' nonverbal cues and the speakers' account forms.

Hypothesis 1

Our first hypothesis suggested a relationship between listeners' nonverbal expressions of affect with the account offerings provided by the speakers. In most cases, the language used by the listener was related significantly to the subsequent account form. After controlling for the mitigating or aggravating nature of the verbal elicitations, there was only a trend ($p < .08$) for nonverbal elicitation cues: More negative facial affect was related to greater use of facework. There were, however, two significant relationships for the use of nonverbal cues during the evaluation stage: More positive vocal affect during evaluations was related positively to the use of subsequent refusals, $b = 1.60$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .11$, and more negative facial affect was related the use of facework, $b = -.74$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .05$. There were also trends for more positive voice and the use of internal excuses ($p < .07$) and positive facial affect with the use of elaboration ($p < .1$).

Table 2. Nonverbal Predictors of Account Types

	Rating	Account*
Nonverbal cues during elicitations		
	(Facial certainty)**	Concessions
	(Facial understanding)	
	Vocal confusion	Internal excuses
	(Negative facial affect)	Facework
	Vocal disagreement	External excuses
	Facial confusion	Justifications
	Facial disbelief	
	Vocal understanding	Refusals
	Facial agreement	
Nonverbal cues during evaluations		
	Facial certainty	Concessions
	Facial understanding	
	Vocal disagreement	
	Vocal uncertainty	Internal excuses
	(Positive facial affect)	
	Negative facial affect	Facework
	Facial confusion	
	Facial disagreement	
	(Positive vocal affect)	Elaboration
	Facial uncertainty	Justifications
	(Vocal acceptance)	
	Positive vocal affect	Refusals
	Facial certainty	
	Facial belief	

*Account forms are listed from more mitigating to more aggravating.

**All nonverbal messages in parentheses are trends, $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 2

Our second hypothesis suggested a relationship between listeners' nonverbal expressions of un/certainty and of understanding or confusion, prior to and after an initial account, with the account offerings provided by the speakers. Because there were two independent variables for both vocal and facial cues, and these scores were correlated (average $r = .72$), all four ratings were used as the dependent measures in each logistic regression. After controlling for language use, three relationships were significant during the elicitation stage: Higher ratings of vocal confusion were related to the greater use of subsequent internal excuses, $b = -.59$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .04$; showing more facial confusion tended to lead to the use of justifications, $b = -1.30$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .07$; and more vocal understanding had a positive relationship with the use of refusals, $b = 1.28$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .12$. There were also trends ($p < .10$) for greater facial certainty and understanding leading to the increased use of concessions.

There were also a number of significant relationships between nonverbal *evaluations* and subsequent account types. Lower ratings of vocal certainty were related to a greater likelihood of using internal excuses, $b = -1.38$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .05$;

less certain facial expressions were also linked with the greater use of justifications, b = -1.05, $p < .05$, R^2 = .04. More certain facial cues related to the increased use of refusals, b = 1.72, $p < .05$, R^2 = .08. Finally, more confused facial cues were linked with the greater likelihood of using facework after the nonverbal evaluation, b = -.95, $p < .05$, R^2 = .08. There were also positive trends ($p < .08$) for both facial certainty and understanding with the increased use of concessions. Hypothesis 2 received some support.

Hypothesis 3

Our third hypothesis suggested a relationship between listeners' nonverbal expressions of acceptance or disbelief and dis/agreement, prior to and after an initial account, with the account offerings provided by the speakers. Again, because of the relatively strong correlation (average r = .70) among the variables, all four were included as dependent measures in each logistic regression analysis. There were three significant relationships between account types and elicitations, when language use was entered first. Lower levels of vocal agreement were linked with external excuses, b = -.79, $p < .05$, R^2 = .04; more facial disbelief was related to the greater use of justifications, b = -1.14, $p < .05$, R^2 = .06; and more facial agreement was related to the use of refusals, b = 1.74, $p < .05$, R^2 = .10.

Nonverbal ratings during evaluations were also linked with subsequent account types. More facial belief was linked with higher likelihood of offering a refusal, b = 1.73, $p < .05$, R^2 = .12; more facial disagreement was linked with the greater use of facework, b = -1.28, $p < .05$, R^2 = .12; and more vocal disagreement was linked with increased use of facework, b = .89, p = .05, R^2 = .03. There was also a trend ($p < .10$) for the increased use of vocal acceptance and the increased use of justifications. These results offer some support for Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

In this paper, we proposed that nonverbal cues are an important set of behaviors for moving through account sequences, and we rated the messages sent by facial and vocal cues during account elicitations and evaluation to test this assertion. The ratings included the messages of general affect, un/certainty, understanding or confusion, dis/agreement, and dis/belief. Although not always in the way we imagined, we did find that messages linked with certain vocal and facial cues during the elicitation and following an initial account could help predict the nature of the subsequent account or utterance.

Negative meanings (e.g., negative affect, confusion, uncertainty, and disbelief) that were expressed vocally or facially in both elicitations and evaluations were more likely than positive messages to discriminate between account types. Although concessions (a mitigating account form) tended to follow from facial certainty and understanding, consistent with our hypotheses, concessions were, for the most part, the only mitigating response form that could be predicted from nonverbal behavior. Conversely, other mitigating and more "mid-continuum" accounts were predicted almost exclusively with negative facial and vocal behav-

iors. Internal excuses, facework, external excuses, elaboration, and justifications could be predicted through a range of facial and vocal messages.

These data suggest that there is not an automatic link between the mitigating nature of nonverbal messages and the mitigating nature of subsequent accounts as we expected from research linking verbal discourse forms to one another. Rather, almost all of the nonverbal messages expressed by our participants that appeared to influence subsequent accounting were messages that showed the other that accounting (or some other form of explanatory response) was needed. Whether showing disagreement or confusion about the failure or subsequent offering, these negative cues seemed to indicate that the listener wanted some sort of extended explanation for the behavior (rather than just a concession).

Interestingly, however, there was a possible link between the form of behavior (facial or vocal) and the account, with negative vocal cues predicting somewhat more mitigating account forms (e.g., internal excuses), and negative facial cues eliciting more aggravating accounts (e.g., justifications). It may be the case that the vocal cues used here seemed more benign to the accounters than did the facial messages.

There was one other interesting link between positive vocal and facial cues and a particularly aggravating account form: refusals. Much of the time when a speaker's second account involved taking issue or rejecting the listener's evaluation, it followed a more aggravating verbal evaluation by a listener. For example, the following account sequence between two males addressed the question of why A was not taking a certain girl to the auto show:

B: Why not? You're dating her aren't you?
A: No I'm not.
B: Yeah you are. You're seeing her.
A: I don't know about that.

Vocally, the challenge, although verbally rejecting the account and accompanied by facial expressions indicating certainty and belief, was said in a playful, almost joking tone and appeared to be a part of a teasing episode in which the listener's evaluation of the account was harsh, and his facial expressions reflected certainty concerning and belief in that evaluation. His vocal actions, with their positive affect, however, belied the nature of the evaluation.

The above example is useful on several grounds. Most importantly, it shows one of the possible connections between verbal utterances and vocal behavior found in these interactions. Although nonverbal cues are often said to function as a contradiction to what someone says (Ekman & Friesen, 1969), making the nonverbal cues relevant only to the interpretation of what is spoken, this example reflects a more complex relationship. Specifically, the place of meaning in the interaction above can be found only by looking at the combination of the spoken and vocal evaluation. The response (teasing rejection) requires understanding the disparity communicated across channels (i.e., that the speaker should not take the listener's verbal behavior as the only basis for his second utterance). Whereas the evaluation challenges the account verbally and is, as expected, followed by a refusal, the positive tones likely take the edge off the challenge, allowing the other to offer a refusal that is seen as a playful rebound to the challenge.

In addition to the instances where both verbal and nonverbal behaviors were required for interpreting the account sequence, in other interactions the nonverbal cues appeared to contribute to understanding the meaning of elicitations or evaluations regardless of or separate from what was said verbally. Although in some cases it did appear that the language spoken could have sufficiently carried the evaluations investigated here without the accompanying nonverbal cues (e.g., "Yeah, it sucks when you do bad" shows agreement without necessarily having to include vocal elements), there were also instances in which the aggravating or mitigating nature of the evaluation could not be assessed without the nonverbal dimension.

For example, the following elicitation and account address the question of why A dropped calculus.

B: You dropped it?
A: Yeah, it gave me a chance to take Psychology from a teacher who was uh state teacher of the year—one of the final four national teachers of the year. So, that was cool.

The elicitation is a neutral question that in and of itself does not reflect the listener's judgment of the behavior. It was accompanied, however, by a strong tone of disbelief and facial confusion. The accounter's response, a justification, seems to recognize this message of disbelief and uncertainty, providing a reason why dropping out of the class turned out to be a good thing to do (i.e., it seemed to be offered to show that the act made sense). Without information about the more aggravating nonverbal cues in the interaction, the use of a more aggravating account (a justification) would not have been expected.

In making sense of the findings in this study, it is important to keep in mind the nature of the conversations and failure events investigated. Few of the failure events had a direct impact on the listener, and this "distance" from the failure likely influenced the valence and degree of listeners' evaluations. For example, the joking nature of the account rejections observed in this study may have occurred only because the listener was not the offended party. In addition, the interactants in this study generally took a cooperative stance toward the conversations and did not typically discuss conflict issues. The role of nonverbal and verbal cues in less cooperative conversations may not follow the same format as seen in the present discussions.

Despite this limited focus, we believe that this study takes us further in our understanding of how account sequences unfold,[4] and we credit the investigation of nonverbal behaviors with this extension. Accounts had been studied previously

[4] Because of our concern with investigating actual interactions that were relatively unstructured, the occurrence of particular nonverbal cues and of account forms varied in type and degree across the conversations. This meant that some of the conclusions drawn here were based on a small number of accounts and that we cannot tie the messages sent by nonverbal cues to the specific cues directly. As well, we chose to rate the messages sent by nonverbal behaviors rather than to code the behaviors themselves; thus, the various means by which the messages were enacted could be described only very generally. This study should therefore be seen as only a first step in looking at the role of nonverbal cues as part of interactive accounting.

as largely a verbal process whereby people offer explanations for their apparent failures. Whereas the focus on verbal forms makes sense given the concern with accounts as ways to repair problematic events, the present investigation shows that the accounting process also incorporates a range of nonverbal components. The relationship we investigated here—between verbal account forms and nonverbal elicitations and evaluations—provides one step toward incorporating verbal and nonverbal behaviors as an interactive process in accounting. We urge researchers to explore this relationship further by investigating other messages communicated nonverbally that move people through their explanations with others.

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