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Title

Successful head-nodding movements in psychotherapeutic process – when and how

Authors

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Statement of Problem: As Rogers (1951) pointed out, it is critically important for a therapist to listen to the client skillfully for the counseling to be successful. The therapists thus have to acquire the skill as part of their expertise. A commonly used technique to address listening attitude is verbally repeating clients' statements or conducting reflection of their feelings. One of the problems with therapists without much clinical experience is that they use techniques mechanically without considering when and what techniques to use to fit into the therapeutic context. As a result, clients sometimes feel unattended by the therapist even though the therapists try to show their listening attitude using the verbal techniques. We expect that gesture, especially nodding, plays a certain role to make those verbal techniques effective to give an impression that the client is being attended by the therapist.

Skillful therapists would say they know when and how they use gestural techniques such as head-nodding, but their knowledge is often based solely on their experience. The present research project is concerned with the following two questions: 1) Does the frequency of head-nodding movements change as therapeutic stages (initial stage, exploration stage, struggling stage, and closing stage) progress and/or speech types shift? 2) Does the phase-lag of head-nodding movements between the therapist and the client change as the therapeutic stages progress and/or speech types shift? This talk will report of some of the preliminary results of data analyses conducted to answer the former question.

Method of Data Collection: We recorded a counseling interview that was carried out by a student psychotherapist. We extend conventional data collection apparatus that are a video camera and microphones with uniquely developed head-mounted accelerometers. Thanks to the non-invasive characteristics of our sensor systems, we could keep natural dialogue atmosphere.

Analysis: The first investigation is on the differences of head nodding frequencies at different stages of the dialogue. In a past study, we found that there are different therapeutic stages in interview dialogue and they can be characterized by the occurrence patterns of speech types (Inoue et al, 2008). The use of the nodding by therapists can differ from stag-to-stage because different stages correspond to different roles in achieving therapeutic goals. The second investigation is on the degree of synchronization of head nodding between two participants. Therapists sometimes moved their head simultaneously with clients; while in some situations, there were delays in nodding. These differences may correspond to the task that the therapists have to conduct during the stages.

References:

Rogers, Carl (1951). *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin

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