

The relationship between non-verbal alignment and cooperativeness in a game theory-based TV show

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Abstract

Throughout evolutionary history, and in everyday lives, it has been a crucial task to identify good and reliable cooperation partners. A good way of assessing potential partners' quality and willingness is to engage in conversation with them. We investigated if non-verbal behaviours during such conversations can be reliable indicators of interactants' cooperativeness – in contrast to the semantic content of utterances that can be easily faked. Specifically, we predicted that interactants who align in their use of non-verbal behaviours would also act more cooperatively in other tasks beyond the conversation. To test this, we analyzed gestures in the British TV game show *Golden Balls*, where contestants discussed and faced a game-theoretic decision to split or steal a monetary prize. Results suggest that individuals choosing to split indeed align their non-verbal behaviours more than those choosing to steal. This implies that subtle movements can serve as reliable indicators of trustworthy cooperation partners.