

The science behind deception

September 20 2010

Think you can tell when people are lying? After decades of accepted methods for detecting lies, communications PhD student Edward Reynolds may have a case for challenging those tactics.

Using popular television programs *Cops* and *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, Reynolds studied response latencies between questions and answers.

Mr. Reynolds spent hours studying footage, looking for instances where a lie and an admission were both on tape.

Historically, experts have used speech tempos to determine lying, and suggested long pauses between questions and answers imply responders may be telling a lie.

Mr. Reynolds found regular gaps in respondent answers occurred equally in both lies and non-lie replies.

"Silence is used in talk for a range of interaction functions, and is not just a cue that could indicate [deception](#)," he said.

In the past, [psychologists](#) have used participants in controlled experiments, whereas Mr. Reynolds observed the television guests in a natural setting, using the sociological method of "conversation analysis" to analyse the lies, similar to an [anthropologist](#).

"I was actually expecting to find some evidence of any sort of 'cue to deception' in my data, when I found none I was surprised," he said.

Published in the *British Journal of Social Psychology*, the research highlights the need to analyse lies in the context they are told.

Mr. Reynolds also emphasizes the importance of taking the conversation leading up to the question into account.

"For professionals who need to detect lying, this research means they should pay more attention to what they already know about the person, rather than 'cues'," he said.

Mr. Reynolds' investigation concluded that blame shifting responses are often indicators of upcoming "trouble", rather than being directly related to lying.

"Future research cannot overlook the research in conversational analysis and [linguistics](#), which have investigated the same phenomena in speech, like umm's and pauses," he said.

For those trying to detect fibbers, Mr Reynolds said trusting your instincts is always a good move.

"If there is something odd in the way someone talks, use your own social skills to work it out; hi-tech science can't do any better than 'natural' ways to detect lies," he said.

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: The science behind deception (2010, September 20) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-09-science-deception.html>

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