

Intergenerational Accommodation of Nonverbal Communication and Control Between Male Hmong-American Dyads



Introduction

Previous research suggests that conflict within Hmong-American families occurs primarily because of intergenerational dissonance and misunderstanding. Although there has been a lot of research conducted about intergenerational conflicts within Hmong families, there is little research dedicated to studying the dimension of nonverbal communication. Because communication between Hmong persons utilizes very high-context strategies--nonverbal communication--it is imperative to understand the nonverbal cues as communication strategies in order to further understand the dissonance between generations.

Objective

Within the scope of this study, I analyzed how intergenerational relationships were maintained through the nonverbal cues of three dyads, and how each participant accommodated their nonverbal communication to perpetuate the status quo of the relationship.

Definition of Terms

First Generation or "First-born-in-America" Generation

This generation is defined as the generation containing the Hmong who were born in the United States while their parents were born in Southeast Asia. This generation will include those born from 1976 to present.

Elder Generation or "Migrated-to-America" Generation

This generation is defined as the generation born in Southeast Asia and having children in the United States. This generation will include those born before 1976.

Convergence/Accommodation

A linguistic strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other's speech by means of a wide range of linguistic features, including speech rates, pauses and utterance length, pronunciations and so on.

Divergence

A linguistic strategy whereby individuals attempt to disassociate themselves from their communication partner by utilizing a wide range of different linguistic features—including speech rates, pronunciation, accents, word choice, and so on.

Research Questions

- Q1: How does nonverbal communication differ between the two same-generation dyads?
- Q2: What nonverbal cues used within each dyad signify relational control?
- Q3: Is there evidence of convergence and/or divergence of nonverbal cues between First Generation to Elder Generation communication?

Participants

This study consisted of three sets of dyads. The following are the Dyads:

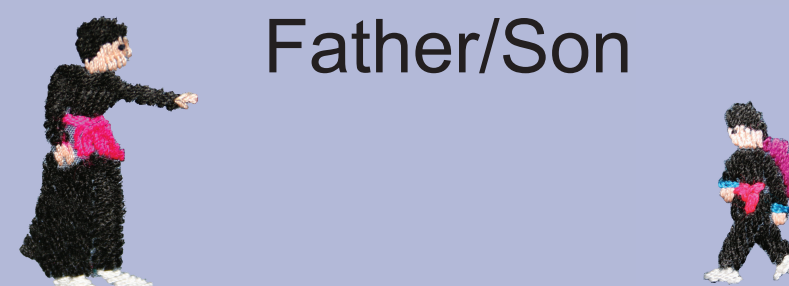
Dyad A
Elder Generation & Elder Generation
Brothers



Dyad B
First Generation & First Generation
Brothers



Dyad C
Elder Generation & First Generation
Father/Son

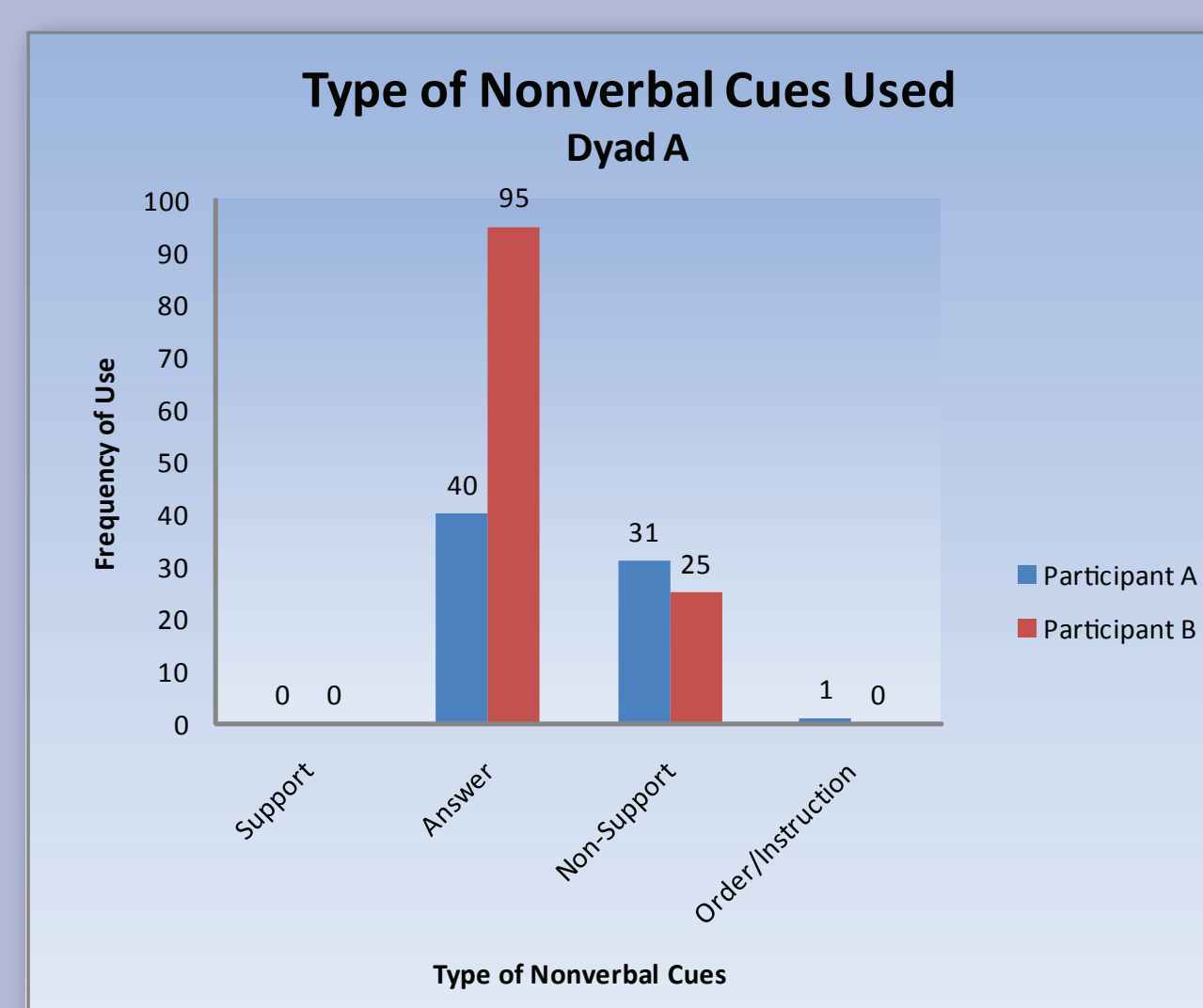
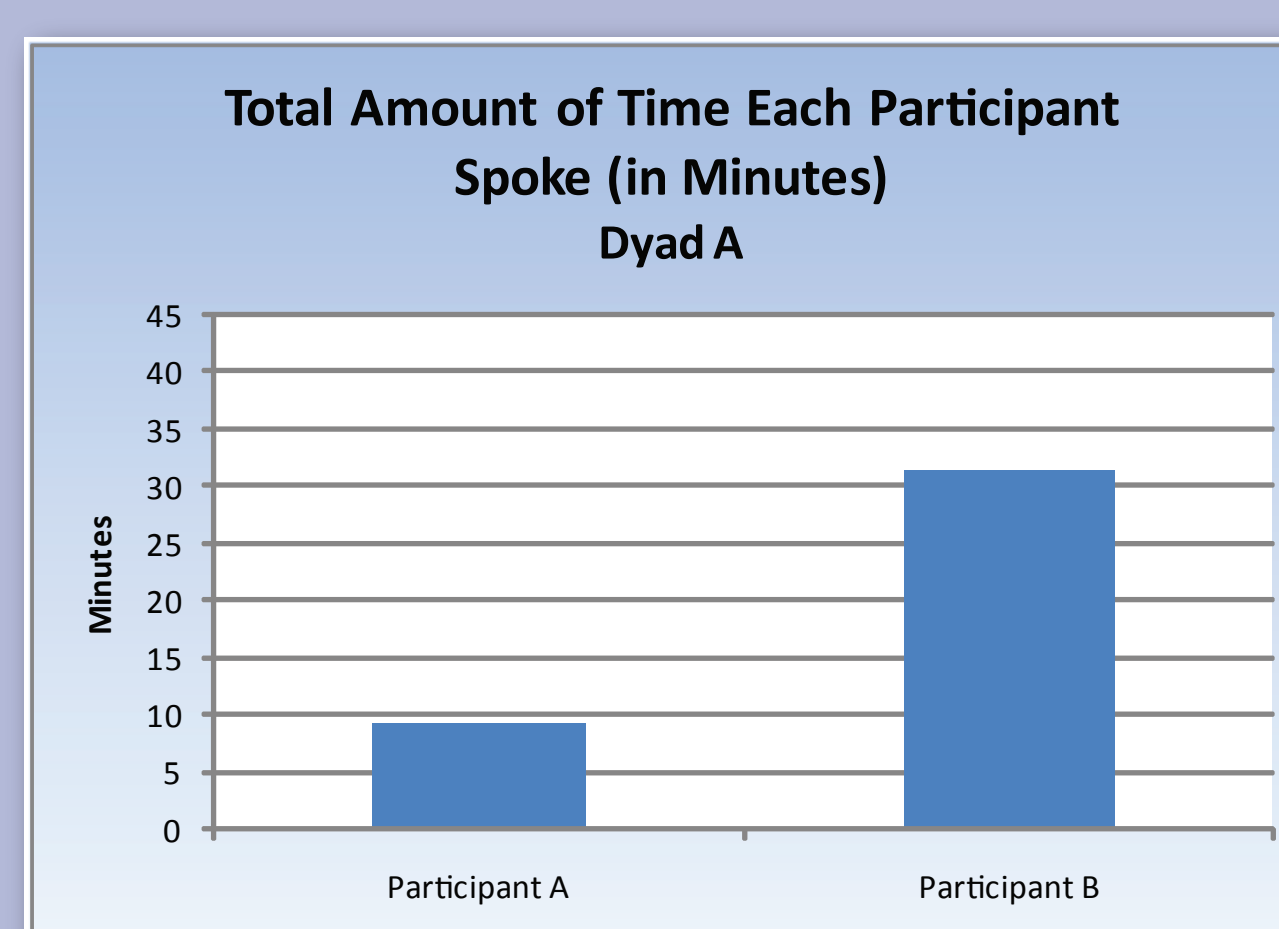


Methodology

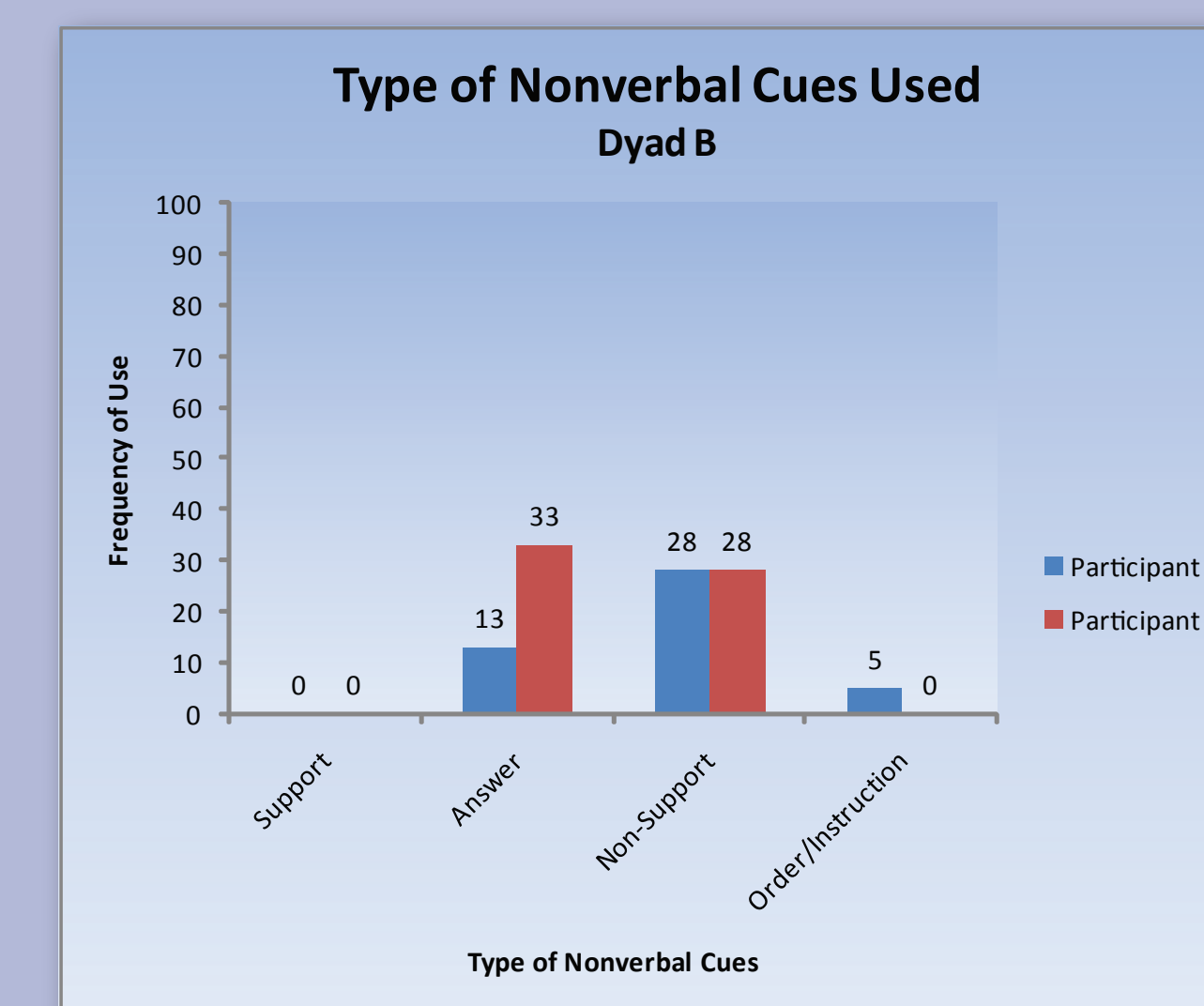
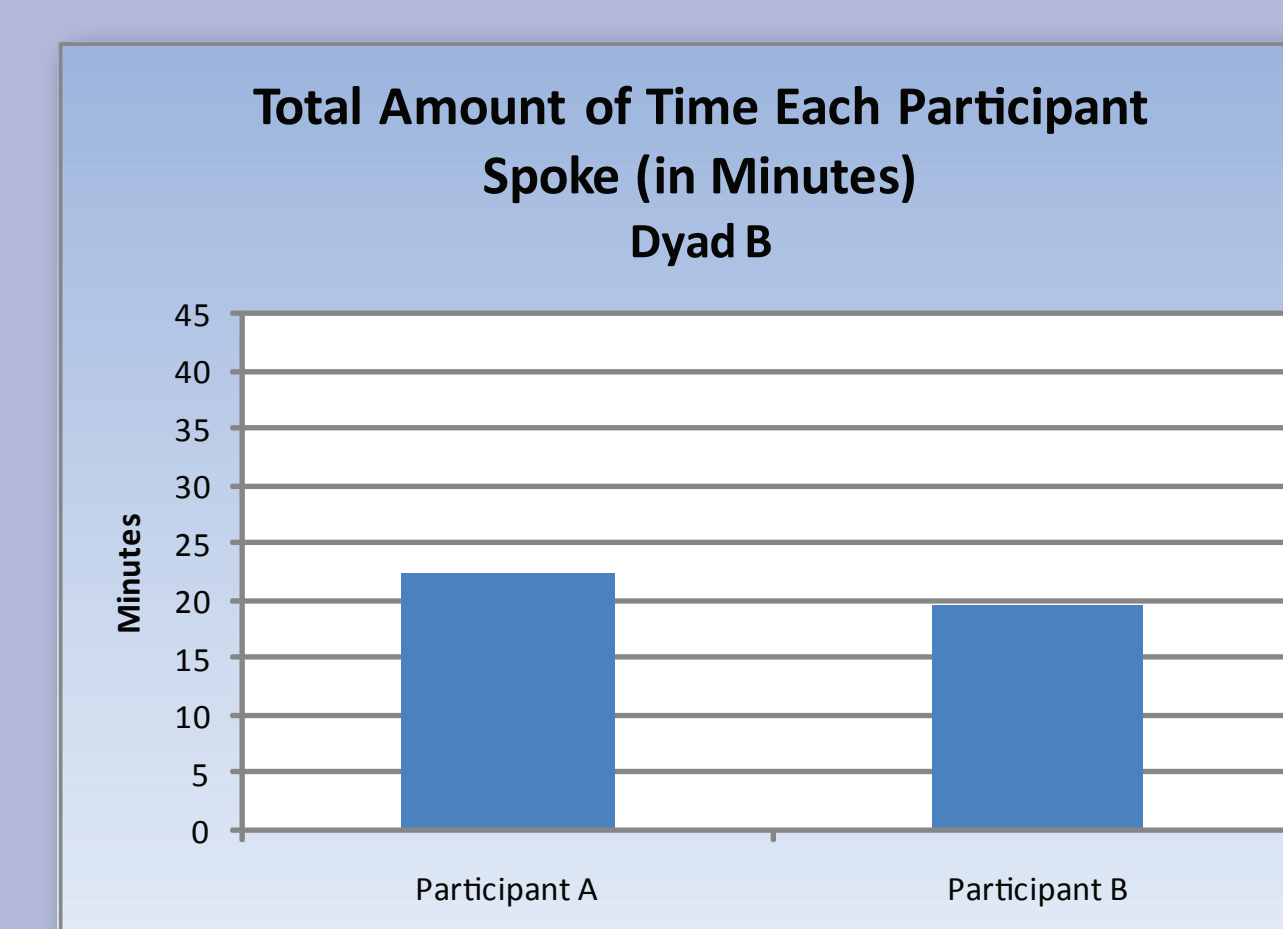
- Local families were randomly selected to fulfill dyads.
- Each dyad participated in 2 separate observation sessions. These sessions utilized the Family Relational Communication Control Coding System.
- After each observation session, each participant filled out an exit survey assessing their perception of their partner's use of nonverbal cues.
- Following the end of the observations sessions, the dyads participated in an interview to gather further results.

Results

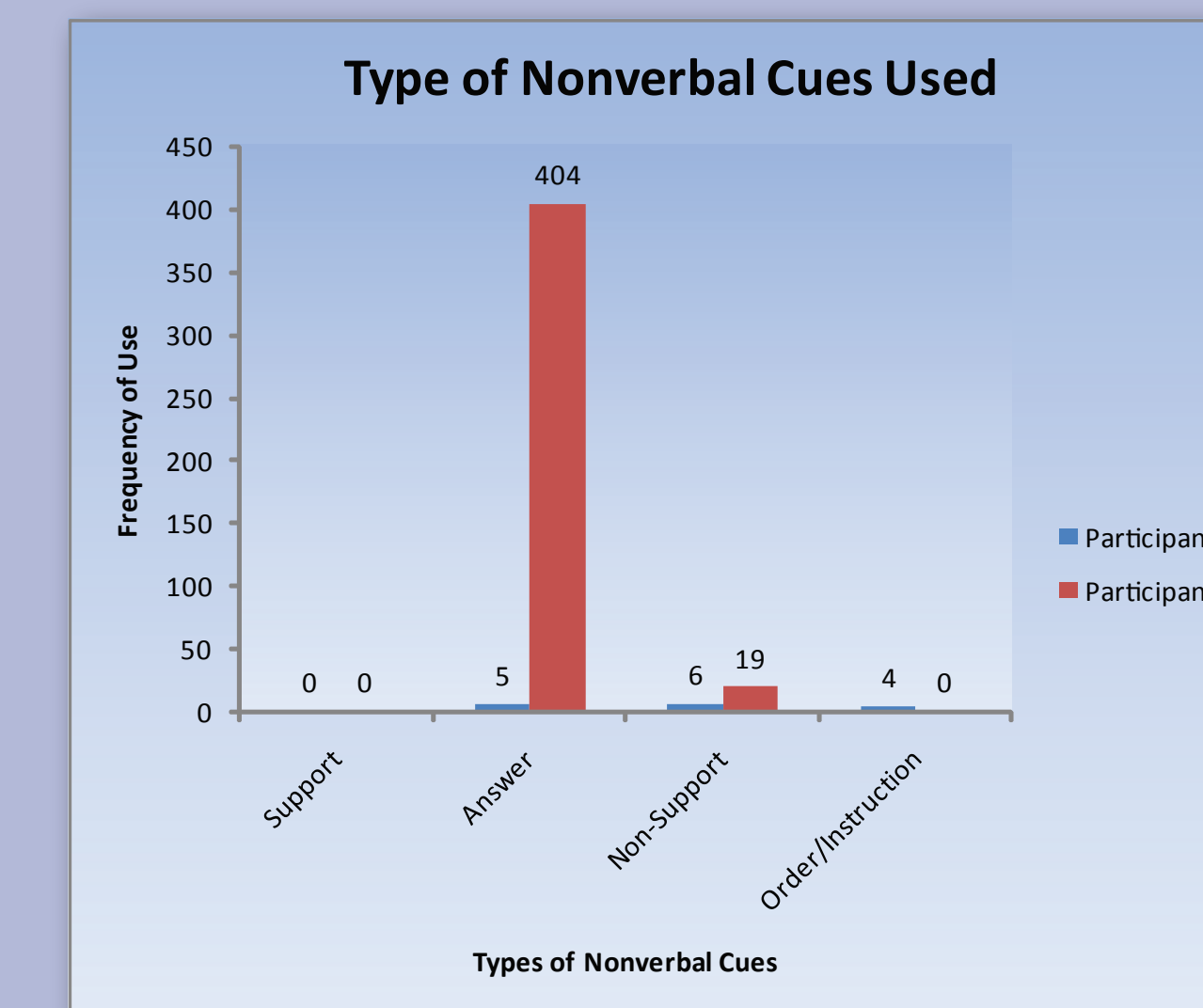
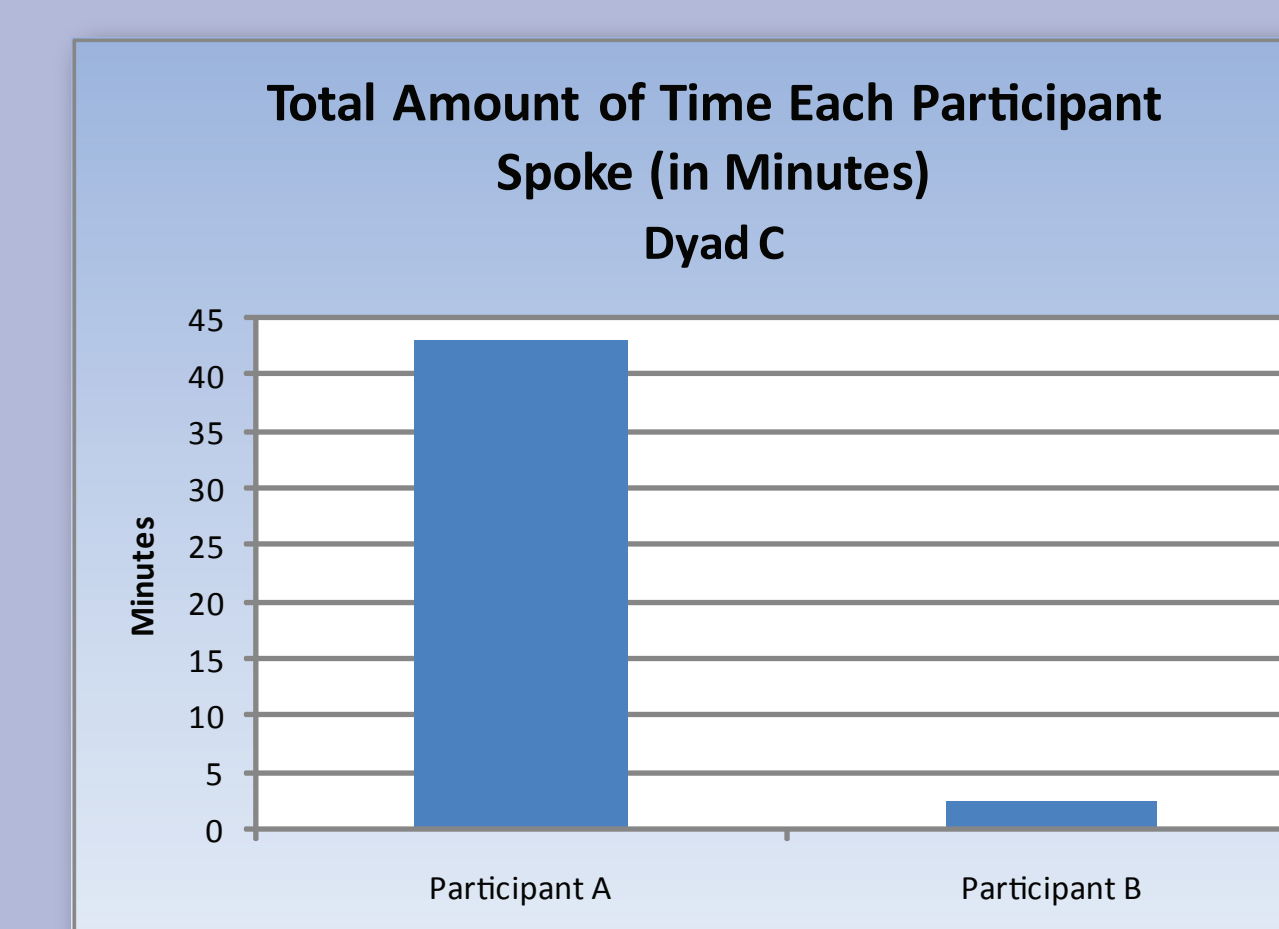
Dyad A



Dyad B



Dyad C



Conclusions

- The same generation dyads utilized very different frequencies of certain nonverbal cues. Dyad A was seen to exhibit more answer type nonverbal cues than Dyad B. In addition, Dyad A and B were observed using about the same amount of non-support nonverbal cues.
- It appears that nonverbal cues that signify control among the dyads include eye contact and body orientation. The use of control techniques are difficult to pinpoint, and will require further analysis; however, nonverbal cues that signify submission of control are much more evident such as lack of eye contact, use of "Answer"-type gestures, and sometimes submission of conversational control.
- There is not necessarily evidence of convergence nor divergence. It appears that each participant within the cross-generational dyad does change communicative strategies, but not to cater towards their partner--instead they cater their communicative strategies toward the role they are supposed to play.

Acknowledgement

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