

Embodied Communication in Humans and Machines



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When people communicate face to face they don't just exchange verbal information. Rather, communication encompasses the whole body. Communication partners synchronize their body sway, and mimic or imitate each other's body postures and actions. They produce a multitude of manual and facial gestures that help to illustrate what is being said, show how communication partners feel, or give away verbal cues. Moreover, face-to-face communication takes place in shared contexts where partners jointly attend and refer to the same objects, often while working on joint tasks such as carrying a table or repairing a car together.

Traditionally, communication research has neglected these parts of communication using the engineering model of signal transmission as the main theoretical metaphor. This book takes a new look at recent empirical findings in the cognitive neurosciences, showing that the traditional approach is insufficient, and presenting a new interdisciplinary perspective, the Embodied Communication perspective. The core claim of the Embodied Communication perspective is that human communication involves parallel and highly interactive couplings between communication partners. These couplings range from low-level systems for performing and understanding instrumental actions, like the mirror system, to higher-systems that interpret symbols in a cultural context. The book can also serve as a guide for engineers who construct artificial agents and robots that should be able to interact with humans.

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