Cognitive Processes in Social Learning

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Questions

- What is Social Cognition? What mental processes are involved in social learning? (e.g., interaction, observation and modeling)?
- What role does WM, LTM and cognitive load play in social learning?
- Can social learning be enhanced through cognitive strategies and better use of cognitive resources, especially WM?

Historical View

- Social learning known to be more of vicarious (learning by observing/imitating) rather than enactive (learning by doing).
- Instinctive: Very early researchers believed social learning was instinctive and solely responsible for socialization (James & Trading, 1903).
- Classical Conditioning: Some researchers used classical conditioning to explain imitative behavior. A child is classically conditioned to produce the word on seeing the adult produce it and whenever the object or event appears in its environment. (Humphrey, 1921)
- Latent learning: Observational learning in the absence of goal or reinforcement (Tolman and Honzik, 1930). Students learn skimming passages when working on reading assignments and may later use this skill elsewhere. One might learn various routes in the town by driving to work every day and this learning may come apparent only when locating any other location (e.g., a shopping mall) on the way to work.
- Instrumental View: Learning through imitation includes a motivated subject who is positively reinforced for matching the model’s behavior using a series of trial and error (e.g., a shopping mall) on the way to work.
- Social Learning Theory: Learning occurs through observation, retention, reproduction and motivation. (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Observation can lead to learning of new responses, strengthening/weakening existing ones and effect previously learned responses through perceiving.

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1986)

- Emphasized the role of cognitive and affective events in social learning.
- Triadic interaction between behavioral, personal and environmental factors influences shapes human behavior.
- Key personal factors include self-efficacy and outcome expectancy.

Contemporary Research

- Dual Process View (Automated vs Controlled): Social interactions deemed to be highly automatic and characterized by lack of awareness, intention, control and mental effort. (Lakin, 2006; Bargh, 1994)
- Encoding/Decoding processes (e.g., imitation, observation, emotional expression, building rapport, prejudice) use little or no working memory and are extremely fast. (Greene et al, 2008; Evans et al, 2015)
- People are not consciously aware that they imitate behaviors of others. Facial expressions are often instantaneous and uncontrolled. People build rapport by mimicking others without intention, control or conscious awareness. (Lakin, 2006)

- People often develop efficient strategies to process information through conscious awareness thereby disrupting automaticity. (Lakin, 2006)
- Social cognition is also affected by many other factors including culture, personality, situational constraints, goals and interpersonal expectancies (Patterson, 2001)

References

[8] All images retrieved from various webpages. For details, contact ssamal2@unl.edu.