How can you tell when someone is lying?

In the children’s story, the wooden puppet Pinocchio could never hide a lie because when he told one, his nose grew longer. Wouldn’t it be convenient if that happened every time anyone told a lie? – or at least everyone except ourselves? But since it doesn’t, how can we decide whether someone is lying to us or telling the truth?

Psychologist Paul Ekman has made a lifetime study of how people act when they lie. Usually they not only want the hearer to believe the words they are saying; they also want to cover up some strong emotion that they are feeling such as guilt, shame, fear, anger, pain, or even pleasure. In addition to telling the lie, they want to conceal that emotion, and the easiest way to do this is by trying to substitute the signs of a different emotion. By noticing the contradictions between their words and their behavior, Ekman found that he could often catch them in the act of lying.

Ekman concludes that there are four kinds of behavior that can give a lie away: the liar’s words, voice, body, and face. He says that the hardest task for liars is to control their words and face, since they assume that what the listener will be paying attention to. Consequently “lie catchers” should also pay close attention to the speaker’s voice and body signals, which she may forget to control. He then points out what the lie catcher should look for in deciding whether he is being deceived.

Obviously most lies are untruthful words, and it’s these words that we focus on. A common problem for liars is keeping their story straight. As we all know, one lie leads to another, and before the liar knows it, someone will comment, “But that’s not what you said a few minutes ago.” A less common but more fatal giveaway is what’s called a “slip of the tongue,” in which the liar accidentally tells the truth instead of the lie she intended to tell. Additionally, frequent pauses may indicate that she is making up the story as she goes along.

The liar’s voice can also give her away, and the voice is much harder to control than the words. When telling a lie, she may speak unusually loudly or softly, may speed up or slow down her speech for no apparent reason. This can be because of the emotion she’s hiding or because she feels self-conscious at telling a lie. The voice-clue that seems to be the most reliable is that when people are upset, their voices tend to become higher. But Ekman points out that vocal changes such as these are not always signs of lying; they simply indicate strong emotion which the person may be trying to conceal.

Some body behaviors can be controlled, but others can’t. When telling a lie, a person may swallow frequently, sweat, or breathe faster. Gestures can give her away: nervous gestures, such as swinging the foot, scratching or rubbing parts of the body, or twisting the hair often increase when a person is self-conscious or under stress. The normal gestures that usually accompany speech are often used less when someone is lying. Or the liar may accidentally use a gesture that contradicts her words, such as nodding “yes” while saying “no.”

The final thing that can give a lie away is the liar's face. Some facial behavior is impossible to control and can indicate that a person is emotional or self-conscious. Such signs include changes in facial color (reddening or paling), increased blinking, and enlargement of the pupils of the eyes. Some people find it impossible to hold back tears, and almost everyone finds it hard to produce tears in the absence of genuine emotion. But facial expressions fall into both categories: some of them are hard to control, while others can easily be falsified.

Since the liar often wants to mask her true emotion, she is likely to try to substitute a false one through her facial expression. The most common and successful mask is a smile. Ekman’s research has identified more than fifty different kinds of smiles, to which he has given names like the “felt smile” (this is a genuine smile), the “fear smile,” the “miserable smile,” the “embarrassed smile.” What distinguishes these smiles from each other is the tension and shape of the lips and also the behavior of the muscles around the eyes and in the eyebrows, forehead, and chin. A false smile tends to be a “mouth only” smile, rather than a “full-
face” smile that includes the eyes. In addition, the false smile may linger on the person’s face longer than a felt smile would. (Think of how uncomfortable you feel holding a smile for the camera, and how unnatural such smiles usually look in pictures.)


31. In the first paragraphs (lines 1-15), the author:

   a) says he knows how to tell when someone is lying.
   b) expresses his wish that we could spot when people were lying.
   c) says nobody should lie, including ourselves.
   d) states that Pinocchio was always able to hide a lie.
   e) states that people’s faces do not change when they tell lies.

32. The fragment “A common problem for liars in keeping their story straight” (lines 16-17) is closest in meaning to:

   a) Liars can’t walk straight when they tell a lie.
   b) Liars always keep a straight face when telling a lie.
   c) Liars have problems in telling the exact same story.
   d) Liars don’t have problems explaining their own stories.
   e) Liars can’t really comment on their story to anyone.

33. According to the text, when telling a lie:

   a) it is more difficult to control the voice than the words.
   b) it is harder to slow down one’s speech than to speed up.
   c) it is equally inconvenient to speak in a very loud or very soft voice.
   d) it is convenient to speak fast, harshly and loudly.
   e) it is easy to hide emotions and facial expressions.

34. According to the text, listeners, when suspecting of a liar, should pay attention to the following signs, EXCEPT:

   a) the speaker’s voice.
   b) the speaker’s facial expressions.
   c) the speaker’s body signals.
   d) the speaker’s lack of control.
   e) the speaker’s clothes.

35. The underlined word, in the sentence: “…they also want to cover up some strong emotion that they are feeling such as guilt, shame, fear, anger or even pleasure” (lines 6-7), expresses an idea of:

   a) exclusion.
   b) conclusion.
   c) comparison.
   d) addition.
   e) opposition.
36. A “slip of the tongue” (line 19) happens when the person tells the truth:

a) against his or her will.
b) because he or she is tired.
c) on purpose.
d) because he or she is forced to.
e) so he or she won’t be in trouble.

37. Match the underlined phrasal verbs on the first column to their meanings on the second column:

1. “…what the lie catcher should look for in deciding whether he is being deceived.” (lines 14-15) ( ) invent
2. “…frequent pauses may indicate that she is making up the story as she goes along.” (lines 20-21) ( ) reveal
3. “… they also want to cover up some strong emotion…” (line 6) ( ) retain
4. “The liar’s voice can also give her away…” (line 22) ( ) search
5. “Some people find it impossible to hold back tears…” (lines 46-47) ( ) hide

The CORRECT order is:

a) 2, 4, 1, 3, 5.
b) 2, 4, 5, 1, 3.
c) 2, 4, 3, 1, 5.
d) 4, 2, 1, 3, 5.
e) 4, 2, 1, 5, 3.

38. The active form of the sentence “he is being deceived” (line 15) is:

a) Somebody deceived him.
b) Somebody has deceived him.
c) Somebody is deceiving him.
d) Somebody has been deceiving him.
e) Somebody is going to deceive him.

39. All the following alternatives present comparisons in the superlative form of adjectives, EXCEPT:

a) “easiest” (line 8).
b) “most reliable” (line 25).
c) “hardest” (line 12).
d) “most lies” (line 16).
e) “most common” (line 51).

40. In the sentence, “Think of how uncomfortable you feel holding a smile for the camera, and how unnatural such smiles usually look in pictures” (lines 57-58), the word which can replace “such”, keeping its original meaning, is:

a) that.
b) some.
c) their.
d) other.
e) these.