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How alignment, synergies and context shape routines in dialogue

Being its most common mode, face-to-face dialogue is a hallmark of human communication and used wherever communities face collective problems (Tylén et al 2010). But how is it that dialogue works so seamlessly and effortlessly although a huge amount of sub-processes have to be orchestrated for it to be successful? In this talk, I will focus on coordinative processes that might provide an answer. It has been observed in experiments how “interactive alignment” can lead to routines emerging spontaneously in interaction as interlocutors synchronize (Pickering & Garrod 2004). But synchrony is not the only predictor of success, dialogue also requires a structural organization on the level of the interaction as such. This can be described in terms of interpersonal “synergies” derived from dynamical systems theory (e.g., Dale et al 2013) accounting for complementary behavior (e.g., turn-taking) and has been shown to aid communicative success even more than alignment (Fusaroli and Tylén 2015). I will provide some examples for these processes and then focus on another factor that can shape routines that form in dialogue: the contextual environment where the interaction is situated. In a variation of the Maze Game (Garrod & Anderson 1987) participants had to solve a task in different environmental conditions. The results indicate that the emergence of specific linguistic conventions does not only depend on automatic alignment and coordination, but is also sensitive to the shared task-environment. Some implications for cultural language evolution will be discussed.

References

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