

## Conventionalizing routines for resolving miscommunication

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A common theme running through models of dialogue is how they contrast their accounts with the “communication-as-transfer-model” (Clark, 1997). This model idealizes the perfect delivery involving a hearer recovering exactly the same representation intended by the speaker. Deviations from representational parity are explained by “noise” in the communication channel, e.g. disfluencies, restarts, pauses, errors or signals of miscommunication.

However, empirical investigation of dialogue has demonstrated that this “noise” consists of mechanisms that lead to the development of representations that are more concise (Clark, 1996), more abstract (Healey 1997), more systematized (Galantucci, 2005) and more stable (Garrod, et al., 2007). A central feature of these dialogue mechanisms is that they place sequential constraints on interlocutors’ contributions (Schegloff, 2007). However, although pre-existing sequential structures (e.g. adjacency pairs) have been studied in great detail, there has been a paucity of studies that directly investigate how sequential organization in dialogue is both established and sustained.

To address this issue, we report a collaborative task which presents pairs of participants with the recurrent co-ordination problem of ordering their actions and utterances into a single coherent sequence (see Mills, 2011 for more detail).

Despite the task only permitting a single logical solution (and being referentially transparent – the words are the referents), participants develop group-specific routines for both signalling and resolving instances of miscommunication. Importantly, we show how this development does not occur through explicit negotiation: in the initial trials, participants’ attempts to explicitly negotiate these routines more often than not prove unsuccessful (cf. Pickering and Garrod 2004).

Instead, we demonstrate how these routines emerge tacitly as a consequence of interlocutors’ collaborative attempts to deal with the sequential co-ordination problem presented by the task. Drawing on how interlocutors engage in resolving these co-ordination problems, we argue that these routines operate normatively, having become conventionalized by the interlocutors.

### References

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