

Discourse alignment in English dialogue: Converging on same discourse segment in instructive sequence

Keywords: discourse alignment, conversational discourse unit, instructive sequence, spoken English, task-oriented dialogue

Spoken discourse is constituted by a sequence of conversational discourse units (CDUs) that are involved in the encoding and decoding of spoken language. In a previous corpus-based study, we proposed an objective method for identifying CDUs based on the mapping of syntactic, prosodic, and pragmatic units, yielding five types of CDUs. In this study, we investigate to what extent interlocutors align in terms of CDU selection over the course of their interaction.

We use a description-drawing task in which two native English speakers of the same gender form one conversational pair. In the first trial, Participant A, who serves as the *describer*, describes a novel 2D object (cf. Rasenberg et al. 2022). Participant B functions as the *drawer*, who draws the object according to A's description. Then, they reverse roles and repeat the process until all 12 objects have been drawn

Every trial is roughly composed of four types of descriptive sequence. The drawer, after listening to the description, 1) in some of the cases gives an understanding confirmation, 2) in some of the cases indicates their understanding, 3) in some of the cases initiates a repair and, 4) in some of the case asks for further information. We focus on examining the choice of CDU at the positions of *description making*, understanding-display, repair-initiation and information-request. Because these four positions recur throughout the conversation and show relatively complex language production. This enables us to investigate the extent to which the participants converge onto similar tendencies in terms of their CDU selection for packing similar conceptions (i.e. giving a description or requesting more information) at the same position within the descriptive sequence.

It is argued that if interlocutors repeat a 'conversational game' several times, they tend to converge onto a similar mental representation of the conversational situation and thus a similar way of using language to achieve the communicative goal (Garrod & Anderson 1987; Pickering & Garrod 2021). Accordingly, even if the current exploratory study does not make a strong hypothesis about alignment at the discourse level, it is legitimate to expect to see participants converge on the choice of CDU to describe objects and to implement several kinds of responsive actions at the same sequential positions as the dialogue extends.

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References

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- Pickering, Martin & Garrod Simon (2021), *Understanding Dialogue: Language Use and Social Interaction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Appendix

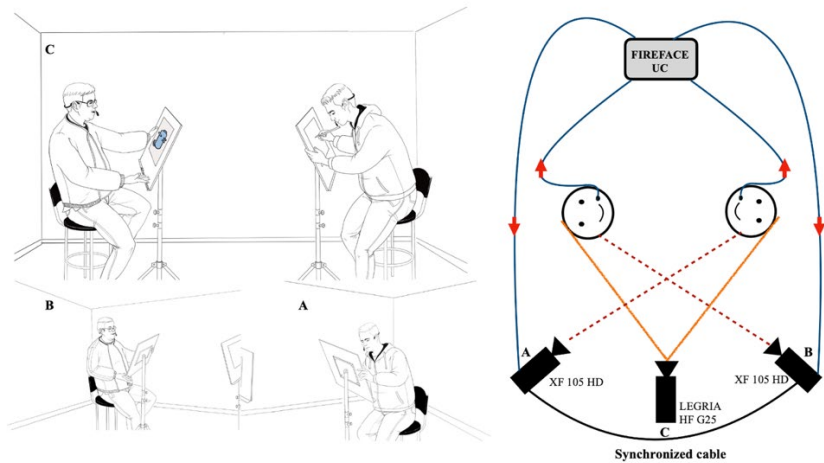


Figure 1. Illustration of the laboratory set-up for the data collection.

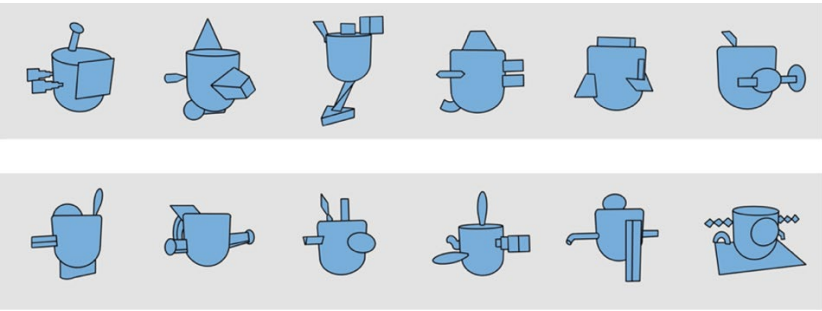


Figure 2. Stimuli used for the data collection.

Table 1. Type of conversational games.

Descriptive sequence	Contents of the sequence				Target of description
Type 1 IGUC	Speaker 1	Instruction giving So, hum, there is a cup that is rounded at the bottom.	Understanding confirmation		
	Speaker 2		Okay.		
Type 2 IGUD	Speaker 1	Instruction giving It's gonna coming right off the top of it, but it has that same feather-type shape coming right out of the middle of the top.	Understanding display	Confirmation Yeah	
	Speaker 2		Right out of the middle of the top. Okay.		
Type 3 IGRI	Speaker 1	Instruction giving And the short ends of the rectangle are points.	Repair initiation	Repair solution Rather than just ending like this. It's a little point.	
	Speaker 2		Are what?	Understanding confirmation Okay.	
Type 4 IGIR	Speaker 1	Instruction giving Then more or less in the middle of the cup at the top, there's a long rectangle sticking out	Information request	Further explanation Yeah just going straight up in the middle	
	Speaker 2		Just going straight up?	Understanding confirmation Okay.	