

Temporal entrainment in overlapped speech

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Speaking in dialogue has been on some occasions likened to activities such as ballroom dancing and playing sports. What these metaphors emphasise is an underlying adaptation process resulting in dialogue partners' behaviours becoming coordinated in time and/or form. Earlier research has identified a number of linguistic and behavioural dimensions involved in such inter-speaker adaptation, including postural sway, syntactic structure and lexical choice. Several reports of adaptation have also been put forward in connection with phonetic features, such as F_0 , intensity, voice quality and speaking rate. Similar claims have been made about temporal orderliness of dialogue turns; it was suggested that timing of turn onsets is influenced by rhythmic properties of interlocutor's speech. However, so far there has been little evidence supporting these models.

The aim of this talk is to fill this gap by investigating timing of overlapping speech onsets. Results indicate that overlapping speech is not initiated at random locations but is guided by phonetically prominent events, such as vowel onsets and pitch accents, in interlocutor's speech. Thus, the analysis not only provides the lacking evidence for inter-speaker adaptation in turn timing but also has important implications for models of online speech production and perception. We argue that the effect is an emergent phenomenon and is best described in terms of functionally defined coordinative structures. Therefore, the proposed account is an alternative to goal-driven explanations dominant in studies of dialogue.