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The interplay between social motivation and cognitive facilitation in dialogic resonance

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Dialogic resonance, or the tendency for speakers to reproduce constructions from prior turns, is a compelling type of coordination in everyday conversation. In (1), Ken formally resonates with Joanne's prior stance through parallels between words, structure and falling intonation contour, while at the same time taking the opposite stance.

(1) Extracted from Du Bois (2014, p. 361)

JOANNE: It's kind of like you Ken.

KEN: That's not at all like me Joanne.

In this study, we take a closer look at why and when speakers make use of each other's contributions in dialogue. What are the social motivations and what are the cognitive aspects underpinning this behaviour? Previous work in two different areas of dialogue research offers different approaches and explanations to this. Du Bois (2014), on the one hand, argues that resonance is an intersubjectively motivated phenomenon that occurs for various communicative purposes, while Garrod and Pickering (2004) regard dialogue in general to be an automatic cognitive process facilitated by the reuse of prior expression. In this study, we aim to straddle the gap between these two research traditions by combining insights from both interaction and cognition to determine if and how the processes interact with each other.

We explore (i) the social motivations of resonance through the functions that resonance has in discourse (agreement vs. disagreement) and (ii) the cognitive facilitation by operationalizing it as the time it takes for speakers to respond to the interlocutor's prior stance. Firstly, based on results from previous research arguing that there is a potential for speakers to make use of resonance relations in disagreement (Dori-Hacohen, 2017; Zima et al., 2009), we predict that

- dialogic resonance is more likely to be used by speakers in disagreement, while non-resonance is the preferred option in agreement.

Secondly, based on the view that the reuse of prior expression has a facilitating effect (Garrod & Pickering, 2004), we predict that

- transitions between speaker turns are faster if the utterances comprise dialogic resonance compared to when they are constructed anew.

The data come from the London–Lund Corpus 2 of spoken British English. The sample under investigation contains 100,000 words of face-to-face conversation among dyads. We extracted 576 stance-taking sequences and classified them in terms of dialogic resonance (resonance vs. non-resonance) and the type of alignment (agreement vs. disagreement). Then, we used ELAN to instrumentally measure the durations of turn transitions. Finally, we fitted mixed-effects regression analyses to the data to test the predictions above.

The results provide full support for the first prediction in that resonance rather than non-resonance was more likely to be used in disagreement than in agreement. We

propose that this is due to the mitigating function of resonance on the ensuing disagreement. The second prediction also receives support in that resonance led to faster turn transitions than non-resonance, also in potentially face-threatening situations. This suggests that, while cognitive facilitation gives speakers the tools to counter the pressures of actual conversation, it is the mitigating function of resonance that encourages them to respond early. This points to an intricate interplay between social motivations and cognitive facilitation in dialogic resonance.

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