

Speaker–Listener Confirmation-Based Participation Frameworks: Generating Orientation, Practicing Turn-Taking, and Dividing Responsibilities

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Abstract

The definition of language has moved beyond the confines of internalized cognitive processes and has become a publicly viewable co-constructed form of exchange between member participants (Galaczi & Taylor, 2018; Hutchins, 1995; Roever & Kasper, 2018; Salaberry & Burch, 2021; Plough et al., 2018). This paper will first examine how active listenership (Knight & Adolphs, 2008) is an important aspect of intersubjectivity and how the rules of reciprocity in speaker–addressee or giver–taker roles (Levinson, 2006) function to perform instrumental and moral stance to build trust in interaction. A literature review will then discuss how orientation alignment can be utilized in systems of distributed cognition to divide responsibilities, and how confirmation may prove useful as a tool to activate learner orientation and incentivization, and how embodied multimodal elements can serve as mundane components of language to initiate intersubjectivity (Burch & Kley, 2020; Goodwin, 2018; He & Young, 1998; Hutchins, 1995). The final section will offer an example activity for a junior high school class in which a small number of students are weaker than their returnee cohorts and distributed cognition can be utilized by dividing knowledge-building responsibilities among students before proceeding to confirmation activities (Hutchins, 1995), allowing for activated turn-taking and repair (Goodwin, 2007; Levinson, 2006).

Key words : participation framework, orientation, turn-taking, confirmation, stance

The Comedian’s Interaction

At some point in her routine, the comedian begins to discuss how she has come to understand human interaction. Our minds, she says, are like our rooms furnished with experiences like little novelty snow globes, collected and shelved for reference. The comedian raises her hand as if to begin a soliloquy and recalls a memory, in so doing, confirming she is herself, and no one else is she, before placing it on the imaginary shelf to her right. The audience responds with laughter.. “All human interaction,” she continues, “is—just taking turns showing each other our snow globes” (Martin, 2023). While this was interesting, it was what followed that struck me. She was displaying being a good listener to an imaginary coparticipant who was sharing their snow globe. Looking out into the audience, she *nods her head*, saying *yes* as a confirmation and *you are*

you as well, nods again, gestures with her hand, narrows her eyes to inquisitive, “*Exactly,*” she says, “*and how wonderful to be yourself as well,*” before turning her gaze to the right, to her shelves—“The whole time,” she says, “your eyes are just darting to your own shelves waiting—waiting for your moment—[to share] *I am me as well*” (Martin et al., 2023).

The Comedian’s Participation Framework Analysis

Martin presents us with a participation framework here, where she is actively desiring to misalign as the very coparticipant she is claiming to be. She insists she wants to be a good listener, but demonstrates poor active listenership (Knight & Adolphs, 2008). Her inability to accomplish and sustain the needed mutual orientation that is necessary for this interaction to succeed manifests as a turn-taking process with no moral stance. She displays to the audience that her eyes are darting, showing the audience that her gaze is failing to sustain her instrumental stance. We immediately understand that she cannot be trusted. Hence, even while she signals the expected or culturally trained vocal, verbal, and gestural forms of backchanneling, we know she is merely mimicking active listenership (Knight & Adolphs, 2008) as she prepares to breach the universal rules of reciprocity in speaker–addressee or giver–taker roles (Levinson, 2006) and take the floor.

The decisiveness with which Martin displays herself as one who fails to demonstrate active listenership could lead us to assume she is well-versed in interactional competence (IC) theories. While this may be true, what is more likely the case, is her natural understanding of how the mundane elements of intersubjectivity work by displaying them as publicly visible, culturally located, and co-constructed (Burch & Kley, 2020; Goodwin, 2018; He & Young, 1998; Hutchins, 1995).

Introduction

The past 30 years have seen the definition of language move beyond the confines of internalized cognitive processes and settle in the spaces between language member participants (Galaczi & Taylor, 2018; Hutchins, 1995; Roever & Kasper, 2018; Salaberry & Burch, 2021; Plough et al., 2018). It has moved out of the utterance and into the multimodal structures of situationally contingent co-operative transformation zones (Goodwin, 2018), in so doing, loosening the boundaries between language and cognition, where it looks less like a structure applied to a situation and more like a structure derived from a situation (Hutchins, 1995; Goodwin, 2007). The participants themselves becoming an endless supply of renewing substrates (Goodwin, 2013) from which IC finds, through the use of conversation analysis (CA), its grasp on today’s second language acquisition (SLA) research. The point of contention remains that interactions examined via CA produces an amount of data that is not generalizable without losing valued complexity,

and as it is not a popular idea to quantify the data (Galaczi, 2008), we are left with no easy path to the generalization of assessments. Yet, the employment of CA allows for quite a wide creative freedom for the development of tasks in which CA can be used to assess selected generalities. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how confirmation, as a mundane action, could be used in activities to activate learner orientation and promote practiced turn-taking (Goodwin, 2007) as well as employ distributed cognition to avoid language-“trained” students with no language practice experience (Hutchins, 1995).

Literature Review

Learning requires attention to the thing being learned (Kasper & Burch, 2016). In other words, a learner must be oriented to a task, not out of obligation to do so, but out of necessity or desire to do so. This discussion is about orientation, but also, incentivization. Levinson (2006) entertains the idea that human interaction has at its foundation, some universal cognitive-and-ethological motivational tendencies. From action chains, sequences, and reciprocity of speaker–addressee or giver–taker roles, Levinson’s ‘interaction engine’ presupposes a natural disposition to complete *When I say jump . . . you say . . . how high*, or when I say *Knock, knock . . . you say . . . Who’s there?* The presence of a predisposition to this alignment allows for quite an open canvas when developing activities.

If in fact a predisposition to alignment exists, turn-taking is the next natural step. However, knowing how and when to take these turns is a matter of importance. Timing is essential, and if you have ever danced with a partner, you will know, when they move left, you attempt a response to their movement. If we consider this dance analogy as representing a physical manifestation of Levinson’s reciprocity, we must acknowledge that it comes with a limitation as a parallel; it is highly, if not exclusively, embodied with a singular function shared by the pair or group. However, in a larger community such as a classroom, where individuals hold functions that differ from those held by the group (Hutchins, 1995), the inclusion of elements of action to the multimodal elements already in play can introduce a sense of physical punctuation or a moment of physical change to the interaction. This may direct the act of reciprocity to take place at a specific moment, in a specific space, signaling that a secondary action or movement in cognition (Hutchins, 1995) is to follow. This would then support the premise that responses are to actions (Levinson, 2006) in a system of cognitive navigation within a community of divided responsibilities.

Research Focus

This discussion mainly seeks to benefit an accelerated junior high school class designed to prepare students to engage with and explore the many facets of the narrative, ranging from

different narrative styles, themes, and literary devices, as well as engage in discussions, presentations, and academic writing. The class consists of 12–15 Japanese students, whose English experience, practice, or proficiency is higher than the average Japanese student of the same age group. However, differences arise between these students; those who are more verbose might have benefited from spending time abroad or engaging regularly at home with an English-speaking parent, yet a few students have a generally weaker English ability than the majority, and for these students, a speaker–listener confirmation-based participation framework might help level that playing field.

Observations

Some students visibly lack confidence in activating themselves in English, orienting themselves to the work at hand, and aligning with each other in English, which manifests as a disengaged silence, a lack of eye contact, and soft-spoken voice that challenges the definition of audible. These behaviors appear to indicate either, a self-accepted inability or low vocal English proficiency. It can be assumed that the habit of using English outside class is unlikely, reflected in the way they tend not to hold each other accountable in class to use English only.

Speaker–Listener Confirmation-Based Participation Framework Activity Proposal

Students will organize themselves as embodied participants within a situated participation framework integrating an action or gesture framework (Goodwin 2007; Goodwin, 2018; Plough, 2021) in co-operative transformation zone. The following will explain the proposed student interactions. The activity will begin with students being put into pairs. Each pair will receive a stapled booklet with small pages, each page will hold some form of a hint to a phrase discussing a literary device. They must create and write a full sentence that meets the requirements of that hint before they can move on to the next. The literary devices included might be personification, imagery, symbolism, dialogue, metaphor, simile, and so on. The first team to write a sentence for all ten hints wins the activity.

From this point, the participants will be referred to as Speaker and Listener. Speaker and Listener will switch roles after every written sentence. Speaker will refer the information in the booklet and gesture to the information being read. Listener will orient between the elements in the substrate generating the consequential stances, while orienting to Speaker. In this moment, as Speaker may be pointing at a word or pattern, Listener will be generating instrumental, epistemic, and cooperative stance. Speaker will read, dictate, or say the information being

gestured toward, and Listener will write the information down and repeat the information. Here we have the confirmation activity as a co-constructed mutual alignment in task. The task is only completed when the Listener can accurately confirm their receipt of the message and at least minimally confirm completion with a confirmation such as *Got it*, or *Next*. No further guidance will be given—the only rule is that they only use English.

As responses are to actions performing systemic operations (Goodwin, 2013; Levinson, 2006), when a turn begins on the action of pointing to the thing being learned (Goodwin, 2007), the orientation to the task is mutually aligned by both participants. The pattern of **point**, **say**, **write**, *repair* **repeat**, *repair* **confirm** creates a manageable closed system of tasks organized using an opening gesture action and a closing spoken action. From my observations thus far, repair can and has taken place (as noted in italics above) during and/or following the **write** and **repeat** stages. The focus is usually on spelling and pronunciation, mutually aligned toward accuracy. The students tend to be opportunistic in audibly expressing their answers in these closed two-participant units. Similarly, we observed in the analysis of Martin's comedy above that time is being attended to, and it is necessary to focus on time management in the act of turn-taking. Speaker, Listener, and Martin seem to attend to time in a way that exhibits a predisposition to reciprocity that incentivizes each participant to respond in a timely manner (Levinson, 2006); Martin has her snow globe ready, Speaker has a pointing gesture ready, and Listener has a confirmation phrase ready. This moment of turn taking, or floor taking, is one way participants divide their labors in a system of distributed cognition. This leads us to answering Hutchin's (1995) question "Given that we are where we are, where shall we proceed in a particular way for a particular time?" Let us proceed by separating the operations and distributing them to be shared among the group in a closed system of confirmation actions, validating the information at each step. Speaker begins by gesturing to confirm the information is physically present, Speaker then reads the information aloud to confirm it they are waiting for alignment. Listener repeats the information to verify the information vocally and writes the information on the paper to confirm the information physically once again. Again, the need here to confirm accuracy creates a natural practice for repair work to ensure mutual alignment is achieved. Once achieved, Listener is prepared to take the floor with a vocalized signal to confirm that the task has been completed, allowing Speaker to take the floor again with another gesture to begin the process. The goal of the Speaker-Listener pairing becomes a co-constructed, mutually aligned and realigned, learner-guided, confirmation-based participation framework. It is constructed as a closed interactional system operationalized as a cognitive transition from *mutually unconfirmed information to co-constructed confirmed information*.

Outcomes

As discussed, the outcomes have been positive. Students have utilized multimodal embodied

gestures to punctuate their actions and aimed to effectively promote incentivized turn-taking, a variety of repair techniques, as well as many modifications to the final confirmation operation. The benefit of allowing a learner to hold an individual function that differs from the function held by the group (Hutchins, 1995) seems to provide cognitive freedom from the greater task, allowing the learner to focus on the next step of operationalization of their cognitive processing. Doing so allows a learner to orient, turn-take, and navigate the substrate elements before them with relative ease. There currently is no recorded data to practice CA data analysis, which should be the next step. Further research about confirmation used in this way has yet to be brought into the discussion. While the research in this paper is not exhaustive it serves as an example of how self-organized co-constructed Speaker-Listener pairings can benefit learners who might be struggling with their English language confidence and how, by initiating a learner-guided, confirmation-based participation framework, the division of responsibilities promotes embodied action or gesture frameworks (Goodwin 2007; Goodwin, 2018; Plough, 2021) in co-operative transformation zones.

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