

An exploration of speech rhythm and interactional coherence and relatedness in Other-turn-continuations in English

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Conversation Analysis (CA, Sacks et al. 1974) studies of turn-taking in interaction have ascribed a key role to rhythm in the organisation of social action. The ‘precision timing’ (Jefferson, 1973) of a speaker’s on-beat incoming at turn-transition may reveal an emergent and co-constructed pattern of perceived rhythmic isochrony (Auer, Couper-Kuhlen, & Müller, 1999). Thus, rhythmic integration (Auer, 1996) of a responsive turn can be said to signal both coherence and relatedness across turns and speakers (Szczepek Reed, 2012; Couper-Kuhlen, 2009), even though it may not always work in tandem with the other elements of the linguistic design of the turn (Couper-Kuhlen, 1993).

This exploration discusses whether speech rhythm contributes to the display of interactional coherence in a conversational practice where this is relevant for the participants themselves: Other-turn-continuations (OTCs, Sidnell, 2012), a device by which a co-participant uses the response slot to re-open, by means of a syntactically-dependent turn, a turn designed as closed by a previous speaker:

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01 A: and we have `THINGS to fInish; Host turn
02 B: (0.4) <<creaky>thAt we stArted `EARLier; Other-turn-continuation
03 On this grAssy `LAW:N.
04 [<<p> and nEver `FINished. >> ]
05 A: [ `OH <<all>yeah yeah> o`KAY ]
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RCE05 {16.40-16.55} “Grassy lawn” - GAT2 transcription system (Selting et al, 2011)

In 5 hours of ordinary conversation in English, only 32 syntactically-embedded OTCs were identified, and these were analysed following a CA methodology. In-keeping with previous studies on the phonetics of talk-in-interaction (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 1996), the f0 peaks of accented syllables were treated as rhythmic beats (Ogden & Hawkins, 2015) and the intervals between them at turn transition were measured in order to identify the presence or absence of rhythmicity, operationalised as a locally-co-constructed sequence of at least three intervals of rhythmic similarity whose timing differs in no more than 20% (adapted from Couper-Kuhlen, 1993). Where found, patterns of perceptual isochrony were created by an on-beat incoming (prosodic integration), or realised as rhythmic imitation during the OTC (prosodic matching, Szczepek-Reed, 2006). The lack of connecting isochrony in some cases was generally compensated with the integration or matching of pitch height and contour, and/or voice quality. This exploration concludes that in OTCs, rhythmicity may not always be aligned with syntactic integration, but the local demand for a display of inter-turn relatedness may be fulfilled by other prosodic parameters, to be explored in future work.

References (Selected)

- Auer, P., Couper-Kuhlen, E., & Müller, F. (1999). *Language in Time: The Rhythm and Tempo of Spoken Interaction*. Oxford University Press.
- Ogden, R., & Hawkins, S. (2015). Entrainment as a basis for co-ordinated actions in speech. In *International Congress of the Phonetic Sciences*. Retrieved from <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/88780/>