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Linguist Alignment in Collaborative and Conversational Contexts

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Abstract

Effective communication is a crucial factor contributing to successful collaborative problem solving (CPS) teams. Research in cognitive science has long shown evidence of linguistic alignment, or convergence in ways of speaking, but its functional role, if any, during CPS is unknown. Based on recent theorizing, we expected that both goal-oriented dialogue and non-goal-oriented dialogue should exhibit alignment. However, if linguistic alignment contributes to effective CPS, then conversations in this context should exhibit higher levels of alignment. In this study, we compared levels of syntactic and lexical alignment between a corpus of CPS dialogue and a corpus of spontaneous dialogue. Contrary to our prediction, we observed that the mean lexical alignment level was lower in the CPS corpus than in the Switchboard corpus. Implications for future research into linguistic alignment in CPS are discussed.