Be timely: when gaps are more than symptoms

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Abstract

Recently, turn-taking gaps, or unfilled pauses, have been viewed as a symptom or by-product of predictive planning mechanisms in speech production (Levinson & Torreria, 2015). Other works has shown that gaps can take signaling functions and that this is governed by politeness (Bgels, Kendrick, & Levinson, 2015). Two mouse-tracking experiments examined when gaps are interpreted as a symptom of processing or as a signal. This was tested by examining how gaps are interpreted in tandem to scalar implicatures (Bonneferon, Dahl, & Holtgraves, 2015). Experiment 1 found that longer gaps slightly reduce implicature rates at longer gaps and these longer gaps do not lead to faster implicature responses. Experiment 2 found that filled and unfilled pauses (gaps) both signal hesitation, though filled pauses signaled hesitation at short gaps. Overall, these experiments show that gaps lengths can have signaling functions beyond politeness and question bias.