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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Sequential Coordination: How Language Enables Complex Innovation Discovery

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7j151280>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 48(0)

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Publication Date

2026

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Peer reviewed

Understanding does not guarantee connection in folk theories of conversation

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Do people believe that interpersonal understanding sparks connection? Folk theories of conversation drive social behavior, and a growing body of research suggests that overly-simplified folk theories systematically undermine social connection. Prior work demonstrates that many people underestimate the value of conversation for information gain and relationship building. Less is known, however, about how these dimensions are linked. One could believe that understanding drives connection, or that the two are unrelated. We present a study of 50-minute lightly-structured conversations (N=74) across identity differences (e.g., religion), specifically advertised as an opportunity to build mutual understanding. We find that these participants accurately predict how well they will understand their partner post-conversation; however, they still systematically underestimate increases in closeness, connection, and liking. This indicates that even people who value bridge-building maintain folk theories of conversation that do not inherently link epistemic and relational outcomes.