

# Beyond repair: Dealing with divergence in dialogue

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Differences in experiences, cultural background, individual physiology and social communities all contribute to differences in language use, meaning that we never share the “same” language as anybody we interact with. This raises an important question: How can we communicate successfully when individual differences in language use are not the exception but the norm?

We argue that what is critical for coordination is the complementary execution of each participant's expected behaviour in the interaction. This is in contrast with a view that takes as central the duplication of mental states, behaviour or perspectives aiming to converge on shared situation models or common ground. Divergence is not usually problematic, but expected and dealt with on the fly. This gives rise to characteristic phenomena of dialogue including repair and backchannels, split utterances and repetition, which serve to move conversations forward.

This poster will present some experiments that systematically introduce spoof clarification requests (CRs) into an ongoing text dialogue. These CRs target a noun phrase that appears to come from either the other person in the conversation, an external source that is attributable to a human being, or a question asking computer program, thus manipulating the level of social agency exhibited by the apparent question asker.

Results show that the type of response depends on whether the target of the CR is one that has been used previously in the conversation or not, whether the apparent source of the CR has been involved in the interactive dialogue process and whether the question asker is attributed with human agency or not. In understanding dialogue we need to take into account not just what is said and how, but also who is actively involved in the process of doing so, and their expectations of their interlocutors.