

Speech Rate and Response Timing in Spontaneous Question-Answer Sequences

Damar Hoogland

Newcastle University

The exact time at which we initiate our conversational turns has communicative consequences. It affects how we are perceived by our interlocutors or bystanders, and how our relationship with them develops. How we choose to initiate speech at a particular time is not clear, and turn timing appears to be affected by many contextual and linguistic factors. One of those factors may be speech rate: Two theoretical accounts of turn timing have proposed that our interlocutor's speech rate should be inversely related to turn timing, an idea that is supported by a range of circumstantial evidence. However, previous empirical studies of the relationship between speech rate and turn timing have come to conflicting conclusions. I will present part of an ongoing corpus study on the relationship between speech rate, turn timing and other variables in spontaneously produced question-answer sequences in Dutch and English. Preliminary results suggest that there is a direct, not an inverse, relationship between speech rate and turn timing. This relationship holds more clearly in Dutch, and only after pauses.