

Laughter relevance spaces

In dialogue, laughter is very frequent and can constitute up to 17% of the total duration of conversation. According to preliminary work on the sequential distribution of laughter (Tian et al., 2016), 90% of ‘laughables’ (the arguments that laughter predicates about) are present in the conversation in which they occur and can be ‘laughed about’ more than once. Laughter can precede, follow or overlap the laughable, with the time alignment between the laughter and laughable dependent on who produces the laughable and the form of laughter. Laughter can interrupt either one’s own or one’s conversational partners’ utterances and this interruption does not necessarily occur at phrase boundaries (contra Provine, 1993; e.g. ‘She is a his long-term heh friend’).

Following Dynamic Syntax accounts of repair (Hough, 2015) and feedback relevance spaces (Howes and Eshghi, 2017) we present a preliminary analysis of how laughter can be processed & integrated, as well as where it *ought* to occur in dialogue. This account focuses on *what laughter is doing* as opposed to trying to determine its meaning (c.f. Ginzburg et al., 2015; Mazzocconi et al., 2018). Much like repair and feedback, laughters can be categorised as forward-looking or backward-looking. In DS terms, we model forward-looking laughter using Late-*-Adjunction, an existing DS mechanism that can account for e.g. sluice responses among other dialogue phenomena; and backward-looking laughter using a metavariable placeholder that needs to be updated with the laughable, later on in the parse, much like pronominals. In terms of placement within an incrementally unfolding utterance, we hypothesise that backward-looking laughter should be licensed only where the laughable is a complete semantic unit – i.e. occurring in the same places as feedback (Howes and Eshghi, 2017) – though this remains to be seen in a planned empirical study.

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