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Prosodic Synchrony: dynamic social coordination in conversation

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Abstract: A key goal for participants in language communication is to bring about a mutually shared experience of ideas, event narratives, and emotional responses. This goal is achieved not only through the exchange of lexical meaning, but also through interactive signaling to coordinate information status, expressed in both verbal and nonverbal forms. This study presents our results on prosodic interactive alignment in spoken dialogues, drawing from extended conversational data in English and Chinese. Our results show that global prosodic synchrony (alignment) and dissynchrony both occur in conversation, and that synchrony is achieved gradually as participants interactively cooperate to build up a shared information and involvement state. Detailed analysis of our data further indicates that participant feedback responses are a critical component of cooperative adaptation to new information, and that the complementary distribution of feedback responses helps to bring about the synchronous prosodic patterns associated with convergent speaker states.