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Explicit and Implicit Coordination of Joint Action

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Abstract

People collaborate daily to achieve joint goals, negotiating sidewalks, preparing meals, constructing furniture. Here we analyzed how strangers coordinate a complex novel task, assembling a TV cart. Before beginning and before major actions, partners used a photo of the completed cart, speech, and gesture to establish a joint model of the structure of the completed cart. Most coordination was implicit, a conversation of actions that could be understood in the context of the current state of the object and the shared mental representation. Actions served a dual purpose, both to communicate and to advance the task. The basic unit of coordination was the dyad, not the individual.