

Abstract

Past research has demonstrated the role of representation of shared information in message formulation. In a series of three experiments, we showed that consensus estimation plays a role in message comprehension. In Experiment 1, one group of participants listened to 168 utterances and judged whether each utterance was a direct or indirect utterance. Another group of participants estimated for each utterance the proportion of people who would judge it that way. Experiment 2 replicated Experiment 1 using utterances set in more complex contexts. In Experiment 3, the same procedures were used but participants were not informed of the communicative intents for the utterances. Results showed that participants were accurate in estimating others' utterance directness judgment; and consensus information influences participants' own utterance directness judgment. Research findings are discussed with reference to the role of shared knowledge in communication.