

Tight and Loose Resonance in Social Coordination:
Clause-Final ‘Too’ and ‘Either’ in American English Conversation

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Abstract

Green (1968, 1973) observed formal similarities between ‘too’ and ‘either’ in constructed examples, and labeled these items “emphatic coordinate conjunctions”. Du Bois (2007) also noted similarities between these two lexemes, and described them as marking a “stance follow”, roughly with ‘too’ indicating alignment towards a positive stance and ‘either’ towards a negative stance as in the following example from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English:

(1) (SBC039 483.563-487.929)

KIRSTEN: ... I don’t know where Addison is.

NICOLE: I don’t either.

For Du Bois, the ‘too’ and ‘either’ in similar examples indexes intersubjectivity and resonance between speakers in immediately adjacent turns. My paper builds on Du Bois’s seminal observations of resonance in dialogic syntax (Du Bois 2007, 2014). However, for the majority of tokens in the corpus, resonance is generally not as ‘tight’ (immediately juxtaposed) as in the previous example. Rather, the typical situation is for speakers to coordinate ‘loose’ resonance over a greater temporal distance in the conversation. Furthermore, the paper calls into question the general assumption that ‘too’ and ‘either’ are simply polar counterparts of one another. The distribution and functions of these two items in the corpus are not at all interactionally symmetrical. For example, the data demonstrate that clause-final ‘either’ tends to occur turn initially, and thus is seen as a ‘tight’ response to a speaker’s prior contribution. Clause-final ‘too’, on the other hand, predominantly occurs in the middle of a speaker’s turn, rather than at turn transitions, suggesting this particle has a ‘looser’, global orientation to the ongoing interaction.