From Human-Human Joint Action to Human-Robot Joint Action

Contents

1.1 Joint Action Theory

A first step to endow robots with the ability to perform Joint Actions with humans is to understand how humans act together. As a working definition of Joint Action, we will use the one from [Sebanz 2006]:

> *Joint action can be regarded as any form of social interaction whereby two or more individuals coordinate their actions in space and time to bring about a change in the environment.*

A given number of prerequisites are needed for these individuals to achieve the so-called Joint Action. First of all, they need to agree on the change they want to bring in the environment, the conditions under which they will stay engaged in its realisation and the way to do it. A number of works have studied this prerequisite, named *commitment*, which I will develop in Sec. 1.1.1. Then, as mentioned in the definition, the individuals need to coordinate their actions in space and time. This

will be studied in Sec. 1.1.3. Finally, in order to coordinate, each individual needs to be aware of the other, he needs to be able to perceive him and predict his actions. This part will be develop in Sec. 1.1.2.

1.1.1 Commitment

The first prerequisite to achieve a Joint Action is to have a *goal* to pursue and the *intention* to achieve it. Let's define in a first time what is called a *goal* and an *intention* for a single person before going to a *joint goal* and a *joint intention*.

In [Tomasello 2005], Tomasello et al. define what they call a *goal* and an *intention* and illustrate these definitions with an example and an associated figure (fig. 1.1) where a person wants to open a box.
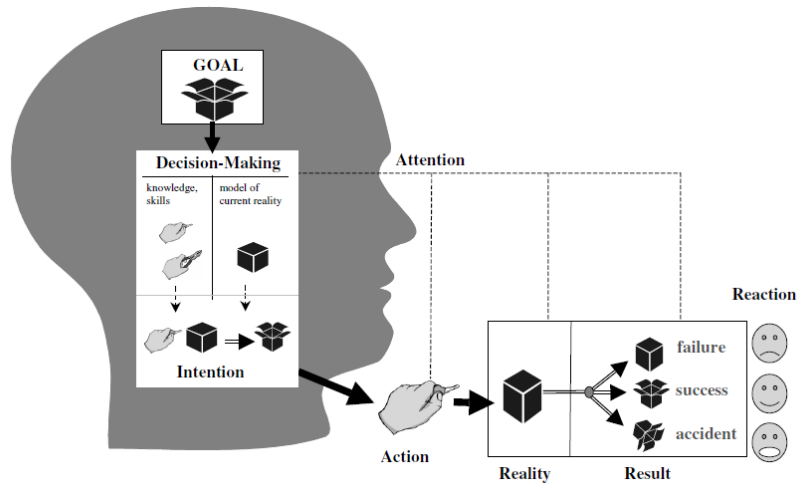

Figure 1.1: Illustrative example of an intentional action by Tomasello et al. Here the human has for *goal* to open the box. He chooses a means to perform it and so forms an *intention*.

A *goal* is defined here as the representation of the desired state by the agent (in the example, the goal is an open box) and, based on Bratman's work [Bratman 1989], an *intention* is defined as an action plan the agent commits itself in pursuit of a goal (in the example, the intention is to use a key to open the box). The *intention* includes both a *goal* and the means to achieve it.

In a same way, Cohen and Levesque propose in [Cohen 1991] a formal definition of what they call a *persistent goal*:

> **Definition:** An agent has a *persistent goal* relative to q to achieve p iff:
>
> 1. she believes that p is currently false;
> 2. she wants p to be true eventually;

3. it is true (and she knows it) that (2) will continue to hold until she comes to believe either that p is true, or that it will neither be true, or that q is false.

However, their definition of an *intention* differs a little from the previous one. They define an *intention* as a commitment to act in a certain mental state:

Definition: An agent *intends* relative to some conditions to do an action just in case she has a persistent goal (relative to that condition) of having done the action, and, moreover, having done it, believing throughout that she is doing it.

The *intention* still includes the *goal* but here it concerns more the fact that the agent commits itself to achieve the goal than the way to achieve it.

Let's now apply these principles to a Joint Action. One of the most known definition of *joint intention* is the one of Bratman [Bratman 1993]:

We intend to J if and only if:

1. (a) I intend that we J and (b) you intend that we J.

2. I intend that we J in accordance with and because of $1a$, $1b$, and meshing subplans of $1a$ and $1b$; you intend that we J in accordance with and because of $1a$, $1b$, and meshing subplans of $1a$ and $1b$.

3. 1 and 2 are common knowledge between us.

This definition is taking back and illustrated by Tomasello et al. in [Tomasello 2005] where they reuse the example of the box to open (fig 1.2).

The *shared goal* is defined as the representation of a desired state plus the fact that it will be done in collaboration with other person(s) (in the example, they will open the box together) and a *joint intention* is defined as a collaborative plan the agents commit to in order to achieve the *shared goal* and which takes into account both agents individual plans (here an agent will hold the box with the clamp while the other open it with the cutter).

In a same way, Cohen and Levesque extend their definition of *persistent goal* and *intention* to a collaborative activity. They first define a *weak achievement goal* as:

Definition: An agent has a *weak achievement goal* relative to q and with respect to a team to bring about p if either of these conditions holds:

- The agent has a normal achievement goal to bring about p, that is, the agent does not yet believe that p is true and has p eventually being true as goal.
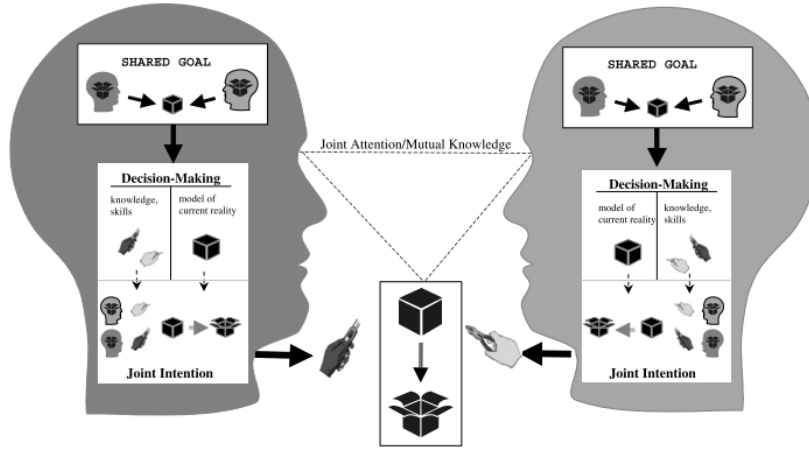
Figure 1.2: Illustrative example of a collaborative activity by Tomasello et al. Here the humans have for *shared goal* to open the box together. They choose a means to perform it which takes into account the other capabilities and so form a *joint intention*.

- The agent believes that p is true, will never be true, or is irrelevant (that is, q is false), *but* has as a goal that the status of p be mutually believed by all the team members.

They then use this definition to define a *joint persistent goal*:

Definition: A team of agents have a *joint persistent goal* relative to q to achieve p just in case

- they mutually believe that p is currently false;
- they mutually know they all want p to eventually be true;
- it is true (and mutual knowledge) that until they come to mutually believe that p *is true*, that p will never be true, or that q is false, they will continue to mutually believe that they each have p as a weak achievement goal relative to q and with respect to the team.

They finally define a *joint intention* as:

Definition: A team of agents *jointly intends*, relative to some escape condition, to do an action iff the members have a joint persistent goal relative of that condition of their having done the action and, moreover, having done it mutually believing throughout that they were doing it.

As previously, the definitions of Cohen and Levesque do no take into account the way to achieve the *shared goal*, however, they introduce the interesting idea that agents are also engaged to communicate about the state of the *shared goal*.

Concerning the way to achieve a *shared goal*, mentioned into the definition of the *joint intention* of Tomasello et al., Grosz and Sidner initially introduce and formalize

the notion of *Shared Plan* in [Grosz 1988], which is extended in [Grosz 1999]. The key properties of their model are as follows:

1. it uses individual intentions to establish commitment of collaborators to their joint activity

2. it establishes an agent's commitments to its collaborating partners' abilities to carry out their individual actions that contribute to the joint activity

3. it accounts for helpful behavior in the context of collaborative activity

4. it covers contracting actions and distinguishes contracting from collaboration

5. the need for agents to communicate is derivative, not stipulated, and follows from the general commitment to the group activity

6. the meshing of subplans is ensured it is also derivative from more general constraints.

With their definition, each agent does not necessarily know the all *Shared Plan* but only his own individual plan and the meshing subparts of the plan. The group has a *Shared Plan*, but no individual member necessarily has the whole *Shared Plan*.

In conclusion, the concepts concerning the commitment of agents to a collaborative activity that we will use in this thesis can be summarized as:

- A *goal* will be represented as a desired state.

- A *shared goal* will be considered as a *goal* to be achieved in collaboration with other partner(s). An agent is considered engaged in a *shared goal* if he believes the goal is currently false, he wants the goal to be true and he will not give up on the goal unless he knows that the goal is achieved, not feasible or not relevant any more and he knows that his partners are aware of it.

- A *joint intention* will include a *shared goal* and the way to realize it. This way will be represented as a *Shared Plan* which will take into account each agent capacities and the potential conflicts between their actions. This *Shared Plan* will not be necessarily completely known by all members of the group but all individuals will know their part of the plan and the meshing subparts.

1.1.2 Perception and prediction

One important thing for an agent when performing a Joint Action is to be able to perceive and predict the actions of his partner and their effects. Based on the works in [Sebanz 2006], [Pacherie 2011] and [Obhi 2011] we identified several necessary abilities for this predictions:

Joint attention: The capacity for an agent to direct his attention to where the one of his partner is directed allows to share a representation of objects and events. It brings a better understanding of the other agent knowledge and where his attention is focused and so, it helps the prediction of his possible next actions. Moreover, there should be a mutual manifestation of this joint attention, meaning that we should show that we share the other attention.

Action observation: Several studies have shown that when someone observes another person executing an action, a corresponding representation of the action is formed for the observer [Rizzolatti 2004]. This is done by what has been called the *mirror-neuron* system. This behavior allows the observer to predict the outcomes of the actor's action.

Co-representation: An agent needs to have a representation of his partner, including his goal, his capacities and the social rules he is following. Indeed, having this representation will help to predict his future actions. For example, a pedestrian who sees a red traffic light will be able to predict that the car drivers will stop. In a same way, if you know that someone is aiming to go out shopping, you will be able to predict that he will look for the key of the car.

Agency: Sometimes, when there is a close link between an action performed by oneself and an action performed by another, it can be hard to distinguish who caused a particular action effect. The capacity to attribute the action effects to the good actor is called the sense of *Agency*. This sense of *Agency* is an important thing in Joint Action in order to correctly predict the effects of each action.

Based on the same works as before and on [Sebanz 2009], we can list several kinds of predictions to support Joint Action which can be done thanks to the abilities described previously :

- **What:** A first one is to predict what will do an agent. Two kinds of predictions can be distinguished here:

    - *action-to-goal:* this is supported by the *mirror-neuron* system introduced before. Here the therm goal concerns the goal of an action, its purpose. The idea is that observing an action, it is possible to predict its goal. For example, if we observe someone extending his arm toward an object we can predict that he will pick the object.

    - *goal-to-action:* here the therm goal concerns the goal of a task, as defined in the previous subsection. Knowing this goal, it can be easy to predict which action an agent will perform.

- **When:** another prediction which is necessary is the timing of an action. Knowing when an action will occur and during how long allows to a better coordination in time.

- **Where:** a Joint Action usually takes place in a shared space. It is therefore necessary to predict the future position of the partner and his actions in order to coordinate in space.

1.1.3 Coordination

The predictions discussed previously allow agents to coordinate during Joint Action. Two kinds of coordination are defined in [Knoblich 2011] that both support Joint Action.

Emergent coordination: It is a coordinated behavior which occurs unintentionally, independently of any joint plans or common knowledge and due to perception-action couplings. Four types of sources of emergent coordination can be distinguished:

- *Entertainment:* Entrainment is a process that leads to temporal coordination of two actors' behavior, in particular, synchronization, even in the absence of a direct mechanical coupling. It is the case, for example, for two peoples seating in rocking chairs involuntary synchronizing their rocking frequencies [Richardson 2007].

- *Affordances:* An object affordance represents the opportunities that an object provides to an agent for a certain action repertoire [Gibson 2014]. For example, the different ways to grab a mug. Two kinds of affordances can lead to an emergent coordination: *common affordances* and *joint affordances*. When several agents have the same action repertoire and perceive the same object they have a *common affordance*. This *common affordance* can lead the agents to execute the same action. When an object has affordances for two or more peoples collectively, for an action to occurs agents automatically synchronize. This is what is called *joint affordances*. For example, a long two-handled saw affords cutting for two people acting together but not for either of them acting individually.

- *Perception-action matching:* As discussed before, observing an action activates corresponding representation in the observer mind. This process can lead to involuntary mimicry the observed action. Consequently, if two persons observe the same action, they can have the same reaction to mimic the action.

- *Action simulation:* The internal mechanisms activated during action observation not only allow to mimic the action but also to predict the effects of this action. If two people observe the same action and so predict the same effects, they can consequently have the same reaction. For example, two persons seeing the same object fallen will have the same reaction to try to catch it.

Planned coordination: While emergent coordination is unintentional, planned coordination requires for agents to plan their own action in relation to Joint Action and others' actions.

One way for an agent to intentionally coordinate during Joint Action is to change his behavior compared to when he is acting alone. These changes of behavior are called *coordination smoother* in [Vesper 2010] and can be of several types:

- Making our behavior more predictable by doing for example wider or less variable movements

- Structuring our own task in order to reduce the need of coordination. For example sharing the space or working turn by turn.

- Producing coordination signals like looking someone who should act or counting down.

- Changing the way we use an object by using an affordance more appropriate to a common use.

An other way to coordinate is through communication. Indeed, Clark argues that two or more persons can not perform a Joint Action without communicate [Clark 1996]. Here the therm communication includes both verbal and non-verbal communication. Clark also defines what he calls the *common ground*: when two agents communicate, they necessarily have common knowledge and conventions. Moreover, when communicating, it is important to not only send a message but also to assure that the message has been understood as the sender intends it to be. This process to make the sender and the receiver mutually believe that the message has been understood well enough for current purposes is called *grounding*.

1.2   How to endow a robot with Joint Action abilities

In this part we will do an overview on how the theory on human-human Joint Action can be applied to human-robot Joint Action. Following to what has been discussed on commitment, we will first see in Sec. 1.2.1 how the robot can engage in Joint Action and understand the intention of its human partners. Then, we will see in Sec. 1.2.2 how the robot perceives the humans and can predict their actions by taking into account their perspectives and mental states. We will also see how the robot can coordinate during Joint Action in Sec. 1.2.3.

The parts which are linked to the work presented in this thesis will be more developed in the corresponding chapters.

1.2.1   Engagement and Intention

As for humans, robots need to be able to engage in Joint Action. A first prerequisite is to choose a goal to perform. This goal can be imposed by a direct order of the user, however, the robot also needs to be able to pro actively propose its

help whenever a human needs it. To do so, the robot needs to be able to infer high-level goals by observing and reasoning on its human partners' activities. This process is called plan recognition or, when a bigger focus is put on Human-Robot Interaction aspects, intention recognition. Many works have been done concerning plan recognition using approaches such as classical planning [Ramırez 2009], probabilistic planning [Bui 2003] or logic-based techniques [Singla 2011]. Concerning intention recognition, works such as [Breazeal 2009] and [Baker 2014] take into account theory of mind aspects to deduce what the human is doing.

When direct orders have been received and humans intentions recognized, the robot needs to choose which goal to perform, also taking into account its own resources. This problem has not been addressed as a whole in the literature, however, some similar works can be seen as partial answer. For example, some deliberation systems allow to solve problems with multiple goals taking into account resources such as time [Georgeff 1987, Ghallab 1994, Lemai 2004] or energy level [Rabideau 1999].

Once the robot is engaged in a Joint Action, it needs to be able to monitor other agents engagement. Indeed, it needs to understand if, for a reason, a human aborts the current goal and react accordingly. This can be done using gaze cues and gestures [Rich 2010], postures [Sanghvi 2011] but also context and humans mental states [Salam 2015].

Finally, once a goal chosen, the robot needs to be able to establish a Shared Plan to achieve it with its human partner(s). Several works have been done in task planning to takex into account the human [Cirillo 2010, Lallement 2014]. They allow the robot to reduce resource conflicts [Chakraborti 2016], take divergent beliefs into account [Guitton 2012, Talamadupula 2014] or promote stigmergic collaboration for agents in co-habitation [Chakraborti 2015]. Once the plan computed, the robot needs to be able to share/negotiate it with its partners. Several studies have been reported on how to communicate these plans. Some researchers studied how a system could acquire knowledge on plan decomposition from a user [Mohseni-Kabir 2015] and how dialog can be used to teach new collaborative plans to the robot and to modify these plans [Petit 2013]. In [Sorce 2015], the system is able to learn a plan from a user and transmit it to another user and in [Allen 2002] a computer agent is able to construct a plan in collaboration with a user. Finally, [Milliez 2016] presents a system where the robot shares the plan with a level of details which depends on the expertise of the user.

1.2.2 Perspective taking and humans mental states

One of the first difference between a human and a robot is the way they perceive the world. To perceive its environment, the robot uses sensors to recognize and localize entities. These sensors return positions and orientations in the form of coordinates $(x, y, z, \theta, \phi, \psi)$. In the other hand, humans use relations between objects to describe their positions (e.g. the mug is on the kitchen table, oriented toward the window). To understand the human references and to generate understandable

utterances, the robot needs therefore to build a semantic representation of the world, based on the geometric data it collects from sensors. This process is called *grounding* and has been developed in several works as [Mavridis 2005] or [Lemaignan 2012].

However having its own semantic representation of the world is not enough for the robot, it also needs to take into account the point of view of its partners in order to better understand their goals and actions. To do so, the robot does what is called *perspective taking*, it constructs a representation of the world from the humans perspectives [Breazeal 2006, Milliez 2014]. This ability can be used by the robot to choose its actions in order to influence others mental states [Gray 2014], solve ambiguous situations [Ros 2010] or to better interact during dialogue [Ferreira 2015].

One important application of *perspective taking* is human action recognition. Indeed, knowing what others are aware of is a first step to understand what they are doing. Then, the action recognition can be done based on Partially Observed Markov Decision Processes (POMDP) and Dynamic Bayesian Networks (DBN) [Baker 2014] or inverse reinforcement learning [Nagai 2015].

This subject will be more developed and we will see, in Chapter **??**, how we use *perspective taking* to estimate mental states of the humans concerning the Shared Plan in order to ameliorate their execution.

1.2.3 Coordination

One of the most important and difficult challenge during human robot Joint Action is to coordinate. The problem appears at different levels during Joint Action.

At a higher one, the humans and the robot need to coordinate their actions to fluidly execute the Shared Plan. The robot needs to execute its actions at the right time, monitor the ones of its partners and correctly communicate when needed. Several systems have been developed to do so, has *Chaski* [Shah 2011], a task-level executor which uses insights from human-human teaming in order to minimize human idle time or *Pike* an online executive that unifies intention recognition and plan adaptation to deal with temporal uncertainties during Shared Plan execution [Karpas 2015]. A part of the work presented in the thesis is the extension of *SHARY*, a supervisor allowing to execute Shared Plans into a complete human-aware architecture [Clodic 2009]. We will notably see in Chapter **??** how we extend it in order to execute flexible Shared Plans where part of the decisions are let to the execution.

One of the key aspects at this level of coordination is verbal and non-verbal communication. Concerning verbal communication, there is two ways to consider dialogue. The first one consists of seeing dialogue as a Joint Action. The second one is to see it as a tool for Joint Action. In practice, dialogue can be both, and, as developed in [Clark 1996], there can be Joint Actions in Joint Actions. Several works in robotics developed modules allowing the robot to dialogue with humans in support to Joint Action [Roy 2000, Lucignano 2013, Ferreira 2015]. To support dialogue and Joint Action in general, non verbal communication is very important. Its benefit has been shown for human-robot interaction [Breazeal 2005] and ways to perform it have been studied, principally concerning gaze cues [Boucher 2010, Mutlu 2009] but

also postures [Hart 2014]. However, there is few works which study the use of non-verbal behavior during human-robot Joint Action where both partners are acting. This subject and the associated literature will be more developed in Chapter **??**.

At a lower level, the robot needs to coordinate with its partners during action execution. To execute a task, the robot can be led to perform actions in collaboration with one or several humans. The principal action studied in HRI is handover, an action which seems simple as we do it in every day life but which, in fact, raises a number of challenges as, among others, approaching the other person [Walters 2007], finding an acceptable posture to give the object [Cakmak 2011, Mainprice 2012] or releasing the object with the good timing [Mason 2005]. But, the robot also needs to coordinate when it is executing an action on its own. Indeed, it needs to share space and resources and its actions need to be understandable enough for its partner. To do so, the robot not only has to execute its actions in an efficient way, but also in a legible, acceptable and predictable way. This process can be compared to the *coordination smoothers* described in [Vesper 2010] and one way to do it is through human-aware motion planing [Sisbot 2012, Kruse 2013].

1.3 A three levels architecture

1.3.1 The three levels of Pacherie

[Pacherie 2008], [Pacherie 2011]

1.3.2 A three levels robotics architecture

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