Berlin 2020: "Explicit and implicit coherence relations: Different, but how exactly?

https://www.angl.hu-berlin.de/news/conferences/workshop-coherence-relations/index.html

January 17-18, 2020
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany

Workshop topic and content

The explicit-implicit divide of discourse relations is of crucial importance in discourse processing, from both a computational and psycholinguistic point of view. Often discourse relations with and without an explicit connective are considered to be equal. Consequently, removing a discourse connective from a given explicit relation (in which the connective originally occurred) is assumed to yield its implicit version (or, at least a relation that is similar or comparable to its 'true' implicit version).

Computational studies, aiming to automatically identify the presence and type of coherence relations, often postulate that classifiers trained on texts with naturally occurring connectives would perform satisfactorily for novel texts, even when the relations are not marked by connectives (Lapata & Lascarides, 2004; Marcu & Echihabi, 2002; Sporleder & Lascarides, 2005). However, the results of Sporleder and Lascarides (2008) suggest that these two relation types may differ. In an attempt to develop an automatic classifier for discourse relations, Sporleder and Lascarides observe that a classifier trained on marked relations performs well for identifying relations in the same data set after the connectives have been removed. However, it does not generalize very well to other unmarked data, in which relations occur naturally without connectives. They conclude that marked and unmarked relations might be linguistically too dissimilar, and that, consequently, removing connectives in the automatic labelling process might result in a change of meaning in the relations in question. This can be illustrated by the following examples.

(1) [Talks have broken off between Machinists representatives at Lockheed Corp. and the Calabasas, Calif., aerospace company.] [The union is continuing to work through its expired contract, however.] (Source: RST Discourse Treebank (Carlson et al., 2002))

The two segments in the above text appear to be linked by an adversative relation (Concession, to be precise, as it is annotated in the corpus). The interpretation is largely influenced by the presence of the connective 'however' in the second segment. Now, consider the text without the connective:

(2) [Talks have broken off between Machinists representatives at Lockheed Corp. and the Calabasas, Calif., aerospace company.] [The union is continuing to work through its expired contract.]

The removal of the connective seems to undermine the adversative link between the segments that was previously postulated. The segments, instead, are now more likely to be linked by a causal or even an additive relation in the absence of a connective.

Psycholinguistic studies on relation marking also examine the role of discourse connectives in text comprehension by comparing the subjects' performances in processing a relation in two circumstances: first, when a relation (naturally) occurs with a connective, and second, when that relation (or a similar one) occurs without it, as a result of removal of the connective from the relation (Britton et al., 1982; Cain & Nash, 2011; Haberlandt, 1982; Kamalski, 2007; Meyer, 1975; Millis & Just, 1994; Mulder, 2008; Sanders & Noordman, 2000). However, this approach is also based on the assumption that marked and unmarked discourse relations are sufficiently comparable.

This workshop intends to discuss whether explicit relations (relations with connectives) differ from implicit ones (relations without connectives), and it aims to explore the phenomenon of relation marking in greater detail. This includes the question of whether/how naturally occurring implicit relations are different from relations from which discourse connectives are deliberately removed. We hope to address these topics from diverse perspectives, and intend to incorporate contributions of researchers from multiple disciplines, such as discourse analysis, pragmatics, corpus linguistics and computational discourse. Specific interests related (but not restricted) to the broad theme of explicit and implicit relations would include:

Signalling of discourse relations (both by discourse connectives and other relational markers (lexical or syntactic, etc.), and their correlations)

Semantics and functions of discourse relations (how relations may differ with respect to varying linguistic, semantic or pragmatic parameters)

Discourse parsing (identification of discourse relations and their arguments, both in the presence and absence of explicit relational signals)

Psycholinguistic processing of text (both in the presence and absence of discourse connectives and other relational signals)

Invited speakers

Bonnie Webber, University of Edinburgh, UK
Gisela Redeker, University of Groningen, The Netherlands
Vera Demberg, Saarland University, Germany
Caroline Sporleder, University of Göttingen, Germany

Important dates

Abstract submission deadline: October 1, 2019
Notification of acceptance: Late November, 2019
Workshop date: January 17-18, 2020

Workshop schedule and duration

The workshop will be held for two days on January 17-18, 2020. The talks of the invited speakers will be accompanied by a selection of talks (approx. 6-8) submitted in response to the Call for Papers.

Venue

Department of English and American Studies
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