Cognitive approaches to coherence relations: new methods and findings

Workshop
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Since Halliday and Hassan’s (1976) seminal work on cohesion in English, coherence relations have been extensively studied from various perspectives, such as the automatic recognition of coherence relations expressed through connectives (Mann and Thompson 1987; Prasad et al. 2004; Lapata & Lascarides 2004; Meyer & Popescu-Belis 2012; Meyer 2014), and the formulation of cognitively plausible taxonomies of coherence relations (Hovy 1990; Sanders et al. 1992, 1993; Knott & Dale 1994; Knott & Sanders 1998; Sanders 2005; Prasad et al. 2008; Roze et al. 2010). An extensive body of literature in linguistics and pragmatics has also targeted the meaning of connectives (Blakemore 1987, 2000; Blass 1990; Carston 1993; Moeschler 1989, 2002; Rouchota 1998), the human annotation of their senses (Miltsakaki, Robaldo, Lee & Joshi, 2008; Scholman, Evers-Vermeul & Sanders, 2016), the role the play for the processing of coherence relations (Traxler et al. 1997; Sanders and Noordman 2000; Canestrelli et al. 2013; Zufferey 2014; Grisot & Blochowiak 2015; Zufferey and Gygax 2015) and their acquisition by normally- developing children (Evers-Vermeul & Sanders, 2009; Cain & Nash, 2011; Zufferey, Mak & Sanders, 2015). These studies have all demonstrated that connectives encode procedural meaning that guide the hearer in the construction of a coherent mental model of discourse.

Despite this rich state of the art, many questions remain regarding the classification of coherence relations and their encoding in connectives, as well as their role for discourse processing and comprehension. The proposed workshop will bring together an international group of experts working on these open issues. First, as a keynote opening for this workshop, prof. Ted Sanders will provide an introduction to cognitive models of discourse, highlighting the main findings from his team and summarizing the open issues that will be addressed by the participants to the workshop, as we now outline.

From a methodological perspective, papers will demonstrate how crowdsourcing can be used to assess speakers’ intuitions about coherence relations, thus improving the reliability of annotations compared to previous annotation methods (Scholman & Demberg; Hoek & Rohde), will compare methods of eliciting data (Maier & Fetzer; Perez Bernal), and will critically discuss the use of self-paced reading versus eye-tracking as tools to assess the online processing of discourse relations (Grisot; Gygax; Zufferey).

The papers presented in this workshop will also extend the state of the art on discourse annotation by investigating the links between connectives and syntax for the communication of coherence relations (Grisot; Hoek & Rohde), the role of context for the annotation of coherence relations (Scholman & Demberg), as well as the annotation of spoken data across several languages (Crible, Degand & Grzech). The cross-linguistic perspective will also be extended to assess the processing of discourse relations by second language learners, and address the issues of first language transfer (Zufferey; Perez Bernal), as well as the processing of implicit discourse relations (Gygax).
References


Zufferey, S. (2012). Car, parce que, puisque revisited: Three empirical studies on