

Cognitive approaches to coherence relations: new methods and findings

Workshop proposal for SLE 2017
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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 (Miltakaki, Robaldo, Lee & Joshi, 2008; Scholman, Evers-Vermeul & Sanders, 2016), the role they 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. The methodological issues targeted in the workshop are the following:

- How can the reliability of discourse annotation be improved by the use of new methodologies such as crowdsourcing?
- What is the role of context for the annotation of discourse relations?
- What are the best-suited empirical methods to assess the online processing of discourse relations and connectives?
- How can discourse annotation schemes designed for written data be adapted to be applicable to spoken discourse?

The workshop also aims to extend the state of the art on discourse relations and connectives by addressing the following theoretical issues:

- What are the connections between connectives and other cohesion markers for the processing and understanding of discourse relations?
- Are discourse annotation schemes applicable cross-linguistically?
- How do cross-linguistic differences in the marking of coherence relations with connectives affect non-native speakers' ability to understand and process them?

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