Accommodation and Reaccommodation in Dialogue

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Abstract

The paper examines how accommodation of questions has been exploited in a dialogue system. Based on real dialogue examples we argue that there is a need for a local QUD (representing questions that are currently being addressed in the dialogue) and a global QUD representing (possibly among other things) questions that have been raised previously and that are available for reraising. In addition, the twin notions of reaccommodation and reraising are important for dialogue analysis. We present an implementation of a simplified version of reaccommodation and reraising. Consideration of how these notions should be implemented in its turn raises new theoretical questions to be explored.

Introduction

In this paper we will first examine how the notion of accommodation has been exploited in some simple-minded dialogue systems that we have constructed using the TRINDIKIT dialogue system toolkit.

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1The paper contains revised material from Cooper et al. (2000). More recent developments of this work are to be found in Larsson (2002).
The notion of accommodation used here goes a little beyond the normal notion of accommodation of presuppositions since it has largely to do with assumptions that dialogue participants have about what questions are under discussion.

We will then look at some real dialogue examples which can be analysed as question accommodation, i.e. the dialogue participant adds a question to QUD ("Questions Under Discussion") which has not been explicitly raised. We shall argue that there is a need for a local QUD (representing questions that are currently being addressed in the dialogue) and a global QUD representing (possibly among other things) questions that have been raised previously and that are available for reraising. We will suggest that the twin notions of reaccommodation and reraising are important for dialogue analysis. When a question is taken up a second time in a dialogue it can be introduced by a shorter or less explicit utterance than the first time it is introduced. Dialogue contributions of this type are similar to definite descriptions which have to provide just enough information to identify a unique referent from a context set. But the utterances we are considering are not by any means definite noun-phrases and what they are referring to are questions that have been under discussion previously during the dialogue.

Finally, we will show how these considerations of real dialogue can feed back into the implementation of dialogue systems and present an implementation of a simplified version of reaccommodation and reraising. Consideration of how these notions should be implemented in its turn raises new theoretical questions to be explored.

**Accommodation in the GoDiS System**

The GoDiS system (Traum et al., 1999; Engdahl et al., 2000) is a simple toy dialogue prototype for various domains; the examples in this paper are taken from the travel agent domain. It has a simple behaviour which of itself is not remarkable as dialogue systems go. The point is to reconstruct the behaviour of simple dialogue systems from a theoretically interesting perspective which allows an extremely modular approach to implementation. From a computational point of view this is interesting because the modular approach allows rapid porting of a dialogue system from one domain to another or from one language to another. In particular the rules for dialogue strategies are

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2See the TRINDIKIT homepage: [www.ling.gu.se/research/projects/trindi/trindikit.html](http://www.ling.gu.se/research/projects/trindi/trindikit.html)