

Commentary on Craige Roberts, ‘Coherence and Anaphora’

Workshop on Anaphora & Coherence

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What (if anything) does discourse orbit around?

Coherence and the QUD

The QUD-centered view (Roberts 1996a)

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At every stage in discourse participants track a hierarchy of **QUDs** representing conversational goals.

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Licensing = (1996) relevance. (a. indicating a strategy, or b. contributing to resolution.)

Coherence and the QUD

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A move is coherent in a discourse just in case that move is licensed by the QUD structure at that point in the discourse.

Roberts 1996's hypothesis: "In view of the work of Thomason and Welker, I speculate that we can use the same structures motivated here for focus in the generation of conversational implicatures, characterizing discourse plans in terms of strategies of inquiry. Roberts (1996b) is a first sketch of how this would work."

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Goals can be (at least descriptively) subdivided into **domain goals** and **discourse goals**.

- Subsumes 1996 relevance, with QUDs as a kind of discourse goal (“the goal of satisfactorily resolving the question”).
- Evidence: integration of domain goals into planning discourses. Anaphoric triggers that are prominent in domain goals (as opposed to discourse goals) along the right frontier.

Coherence and the QUD

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A move is coherent in discourse just in case it is **licensed** by the goals of discourse participants at that point in the discourse.

“A move m is Relevant to a goal g iff m constitutes or proposes part of a strategy for achieving g .” Strategy for a goal g in general(?): a plan, consisting of a set of subgoals which subserve (help) accomplish g .

Coherence and the QUD

The goal-centered view (Roberts 2012, this paper)

A move is coherent in discourse just in case it is licensed by the goals of discourse participants at that point in the discourse.

Roberts (2012): “Interpretation is driven and constrained by the interlocutors’ publicly evident intentions and goals, as reflected in the requirement of Relevance to the QUD. The interlocutors’ recognition of and cooperative commitment to those intentions is essential to their collaboration in conveying and Retrieving meaning_{nn}.”

Coherence relations and relevance

How do coherence relations fit into a goal-centered view? **Not reductive.**

“The hypothesis is, then, that most of the Content-level relations of Asher & Lascarides (2003) and the coherence relations of Kehler (2002) are *pre-compiled types of building blocks* that play roles in the construction of complex strategies of inquiry and goal resolution. They are often (semi-)conventionally signaled, especially by particular connectives or discourse particles.”

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“There is no intention here to reduce such discourse relations to goals or questions. Rather, it is to claim that the central structure in which such relations play a role is intentional in character”

Coherence relations and relevance

How do the pieces relate?

Coherence \Rightarrow intentional structure \Rightarrow anaphora resolution
(this paper)

vs.

Intentional structure \Rightarrow coherence \Rightarrow anaphora resolution

vs.

Intentional structure \Rightarrow anaphora resolution \Leftarrow coherence
(vs...)

Further questions for discussion I

- Are QUDs special, or just another kind of goal? Are discourse goals a distinguished category?
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- Are QUDs special, or just another kind of goal? Are discourse goals a distinguished category?
- What does a full account of strategies look like?
- A concern sometimes expressed about QUDs: the idea isn't falsifiable because you can always post-hoc find a (potentially big) QUD for any given discourse. Is the situation worse or better when centering around intentional structure? How would one falsify the goal-centered hypothesis?

What does it take to falsify a theory in this domain?

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- To what degree can a general notion of goal (or QUD) subsume specific coherence/discourse relations?
- To what extent can the establishment of domain goals be reduced to inquiry about those goals? (Back to Roberts 1996)

Bibliography I

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