THE ROLE OF DMS ON THE MARKING OF QUESTION-ANSWER AGREEMENT

Abstract submission | Workshop: "Explicit and implicit coherence relations: Different, but how exactly?"

This empirical study analyses the signaling of discourse relations by discourse markers (DMs) from a Question Under Discussion (QUD) approach (Roberts 1996/2012). In concrete, we explore the DMs usage as a strategy in making implicit discourse structure clear. The synchronic analysis is conducted in spontaneous spoken dialogues in Spanish and French (from www.sgscorpus.com, Adli 2011).

The QUD approach to discourse structure builds on Carlson's (1982) central insights that dialogues are functionally organized by question/answer relations, though the questions are often only implicit, inferred on the basis of other cues (Carlson 1982; Roberts 2012; Krifka 2008). The most studied of such clues relate to the IS of the phrase (e.g.: focus and contrastive topic-marking constrain what the question can be).

(1)

    a) [In SEPTEmber]$_F$ we went to the Caribbean Sea   (***when** did you go to the Caribbean Sea?*)

    b) [In August]$_{CT}$ we went [to the CariBBean SEA]$_F$ (***where** did you go in the summer?*)

    c) It was [us]$_F$ who went to the Caribbean Sea in September (***who** went to the Caribbean Sea in September?*)

The QUD model presents a range of constraints that relate information structure (IS) to discourse structure, notably constraints on the 'Relevance' of utterances, on the 'Congruence' of answers to questions, and on the 'Availability' of discourse antecedents. The presence of these constraints in the QUD model enables an account of question accommodation based on the idea that some constraint violations can be repaired (Velleman & Biever 2017). In a nutshell, the recognition of constrains (violations) points at accommodating implicit questions, similar to Lewis's (1979) account of presupposition accommodation.

(2)

    a)   A: How was holidays?

             (*what did you do?*)

    b)   B: [We went to the Caribbean Sea]$_F$.

DMs contribution to the discourse can similarly be analysed as **part of a repair strategy**, along with the discourse effects of focus and contrastive topic-marking (Roberts 1996/2012, Büring 2003/2016) making the *Current* question salient.

(3)

    a) A: ¿se la veía muy nerviosa?

         her see.3SG very nervous?

       'did she look too nervous'

    b) B: *bueno claro, yo la primera vez que he entrado la señora Comas no estaba.*

       bueno claro, I the first time that enter.1SG the Mrs. Comas no be. 3SG

       'well, of course, the first time I entered Mrs Comas was not there' (sgs, 26/247)

In **3b** the DM *bueno* anchors an implicit QUD: when the speaker does not address the *Current* (explicit) Question, she uses the form *bueno* for 'excusing' or 'informing' her addressee of this movement. Otherwise, there may be a Congruence issue. The DM *bueno* marks simultaneously the cancellation of a presupposition (*B saw Ms Comas*), and that B's contribution does not answer the immediate solicited QUD, but instead provides a reason for the presupposition cancellation. Accordingly, **3b** introduces a preparatory condition for answering the CQ and updates the hearer's background. Only then, speaker B is able to answer (through an implicature: *I don't know*) speaker A's Yes-No explicit QUD.

Our contribution aims at deepening in our understanding of how exactly DMs facilitate cognitive processing, that is, by means of helping to mark the question-answer pairs, and consequently facilitating accommodating the presence and/or meaning of the questions that are not overtly expressed.

This study presents QUD annotation guidelines for the study of DMs, which define distinctive discourse units, the mechanisms that bound them together and a typology of dependency relations. Although very much casted on previous contributions (Riester et all. 2018), the present guidelines: (i) include more than two types of discourse moves (QUESTIONS and ASSERTIONS) given the nature of the data (eg. DENIALS [van der Sandt 1991, Repp 2013]), (ii) extends over implicit questions on the proffered content to also consider assertions addressing implicit presupposed content (eg. 1b above), and (iii) recognizes five types of dependency relations. The later distinction depend on the type of the discourse move and of its parent (e.g. on whether they are QUESTIONS, ANSWERS or FEEDERS).
The identification of QUD dependency relations rely on constraints that relate IS to discourse structure (e.g. congruence principle), and on conversational constraints (e.g. Grice's [1968] Maxims), typically with answering moves that address a pragmatically implicit QUD.

The annotated data is used to explore the distribution of DMs in assertions addressing overt and implicit QUDs, its co-occurrence (or not) with heavy IS marking of implicit Q-A congruence (eg. involving contrastive topic marking and/or focus marking) and the presence of ellipsis. The latter is justified under the assumption that material which was given in an overt question can often be omitted from the answer; but this is not possible in cases like 3b where questions are not overt.

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