Annotation Guidelines: Arguments with personal experiences

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Introduction

When people discuss with each other, they often not only rely on rational arguments, but also support their points of view with alternative forms of communication, for example, they share personal experiences. This happens above all in less formal contexts, i.e. when people or citizens discuss certain topics online or in small groups. The goal of the annotation study is to investigate where in the arguments the personal experiences are described, what functions they take within such arguments and what effect they can have on the other participants in the discourse.

At the core of the annotation is the discourse contribution or post that contains a personal experience. In the context of the whole contribution and with regard to the discourse topic, some properties of the experience will then be annotated in more detail.

Instructions

Go to `https://7c2696e6-eca6-4631-8b71-f3f912d92cf5.ma.bw-cloud-instance.org/login.html` to open the annotation platform `inception`. Sign in with your User ID and password. Select the project *StorytellingRound3* and then *Annotation*. You will see a list of documents that can be annotated. Once you select a document you will see the document view.

Each document is a contribution (either a comment from a discussion forum or a spoken contribution from a group discussion). In your settings increase the number of lines displayed on one page (e.g. 20) so that it is likely that you will see the whole contribution. The first line displays the underlying corpus.
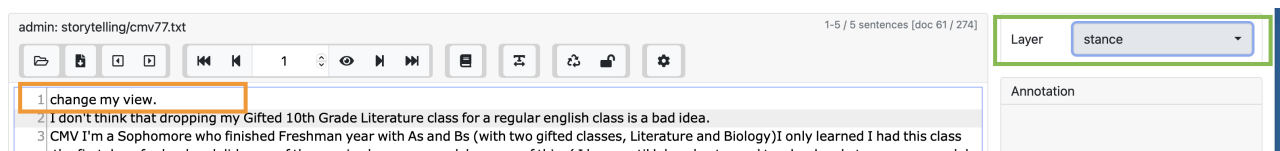

Figure 1: Document view: The first line (orange) is the source of the contribution. On the right side (green) you can select different layers

As a first step you should read the document / post and try to understand and note down the position of the author. Then you should mark all experiences and annotate several properties for each of these.

1 Stance

Select the layer *stance*. Because inception doesn't allow document-based annotations you have to select the **first line** of the document, which contains the information about the source of the contribution (see figure 2). Before you annotate make sure **you have read the corpus-specific information**: for each source you find general information about the topics discussed and the type of data (e.g. for Europolis, the information can be read in section 1.1.

Read the contribution. Does the contribution explicitly or implicitly express an opinion on a certain issue? The issue can be explicitly mentioned (e.g. "I think peanuts should be completely banned from airplanes") or left implicit because it is one of the issues discussed in general (check the corresponding section on the source of the contribution to find a list of concrete issues being discussed) or because the author agrees or disagrees with another author ("I agree / disagree with X..."). Write down the position or idea that is conveyed within this post into the corresponding csv file. The csv file contains two columns: the ID of the document and the second column should contain the position of the corresponding contribution and should be filled out by you; e.g. if your document is the one of Figure 2 you should note down the position of the author into the column next to 'cmv77'. If you cannot identify a position or opinion within the contribution, select `UNCLEAR`.
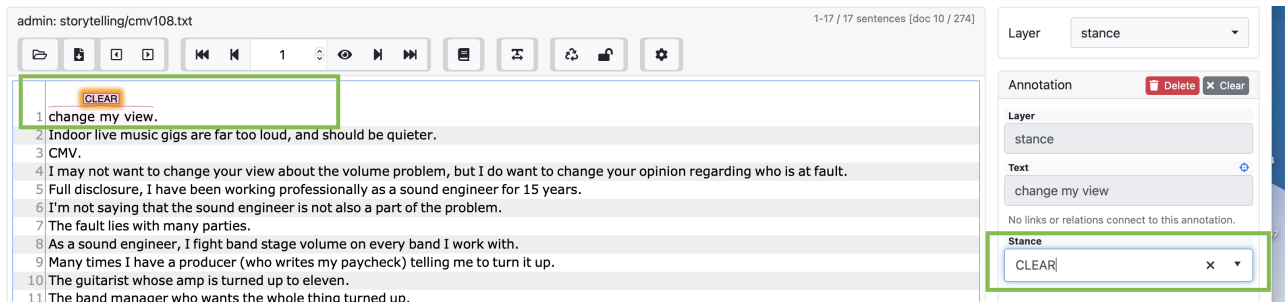
Figure 2: General Stance: Select the layer *stance* and mark the first line (green). Then you should annotate whether the position is CLEAR or UNCLEAR for the whole contribution

1.1 Europolis

This source is a group discussion of citizens from different European countries about the EU and the topic immigration. The contribution can convey a position towards one of the following targets:

- illegal immigrants should be legalized

- we should build walls and seal borders

- illegal immigrants should be sent back home

- integration / assimilation is a good solution for (illegal) immigration

- immigration should be controlled for workers with skills that are needed in a country

- immigration increases crime in our society

- Muslim immigrants threaten culture

1.2 Regulation Room

The regulation room is an online platform where citizens can discuss specific regulations that are proposed by companies and institutes and that will affect everyday life of customers or employers.

1.2.1 peanut allergy

The target of the discussion is the following:

- The use of peanut products on airplanes should be restricted (e.g. completely banned, only be consumed in a specific area, banned if peanut allergy sufferers are on board).

You can have a look on the platform and the discussion about peanut product regulations via this link: `http://archive.regulationroom.org/airline-passenger-rights/index.html%3Fp=52.html`

1.2.2 consumer debt collection practices

This discussion is about how creditors and debt collectors can act to get consumers to pay overdue credit card, medical, student loan, auto or other loans in the US. The people discussing a sharing their opinion about the way information about debt is collected. Some people have their own business for collecting debts, some have experienced abusive methods for debt collection, such as constant calling or violation of data privacy.
You can have a look on the platform and the discussion about regulating consumer debt collection practices via this link: `http://www.regulationroom.org/rules/consumer-debt-collection-practices-anprm/`

1.3 Change my View

This is an online platform where a person presents an argument for a specific view. Other people can convince the person from the opposite view. **The issue is always stated as the first sentence of the contribution.** (see figure 3)
DISCLAIMER: Some of the topics discussed can include violence, suicide or rape. As the issue is always stated as the first sentence you can skip annotating the comment.

Figure 3: change my view: If the source is change my view (orange) the issue is always stated as the first sentence of the contribution (green)

1.4 Vegan Discourse

This data contains user comments extracted from newspaper articles related to the discourse about veganism. Veganism is discussed with regards to various aspects: ethical considerations, animal rights, climate change and sustainability, food industry etc.

2 Annotation: Experience

Each document may contain several experiences. Make sure you have selected the layer *personal experience* (compare figure 6) Read the whole contribution and decide whether it contains personal experiences. Mark all spans in the text that mention or describes an experience. It is possible that there are several experiences. It is also possible that there is no experience, then you can directly click on *finish document* (Figure 4). A span
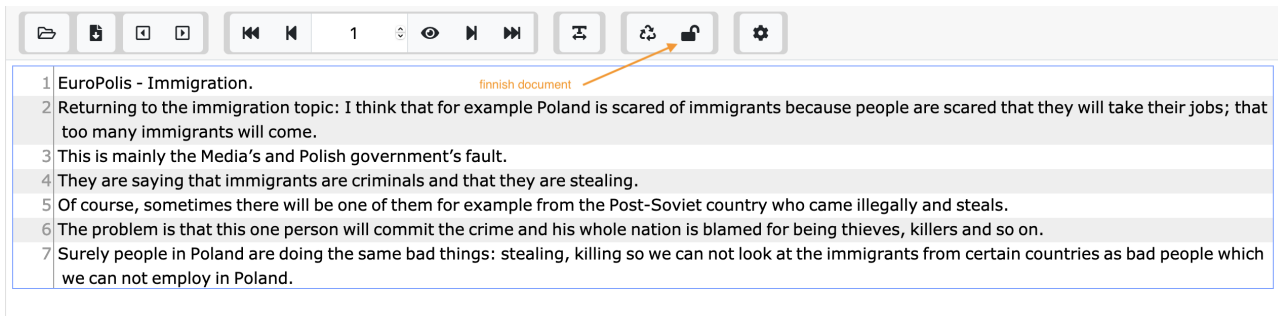

Figure 4: Document view: Click finish document after you are done with the annoation.

describing an experience can cross sentence boundaries. If you are unsure about the exact boundaries, mark a little more rather than less. If an experience is distributed across spans, e.g. you feel like the experience is split up into parts and there are some irrelevant parts in between, still mark the whole experience, containing the spitted sub-spans and the irrelevant span in between. You should annotate 8 properties of each experience. Each property has more detailed guidelines and examples that should help you to annotate:

1. **Experience Type**: does the contribution contain a story or experiential knowledge?

2. **Hypothetical**: is the story hypothetical?

3. **Protagonist**: who is the main character / 'the experiencer'?

4. **Proximity**: is it a first-hand or second-hand experience?

5. **Argumentative Function**: what is the argumentative function of the experience?

6. **Emotional Load**: is the experience framed in an emotional tone?

7. **Effectiveness of the experience**: does the experience make the contribution more effective?

The order in which you annotate these is your own choice (some may find it easier to decide about the function of the experience first, others may want to start with main character). You can do it in the way that is easiest for you to annotate it and you can also do it differently for different experiences.

If there are specific words in the comment that triggered your decision to mark something as an experience, please select them by using the layer **hints**. Mark a word that you found being an indicator for your decision and press h to select it as a hint (compare Figure 5). You can mark as many words as you want but if there are no specific words that you found indicative, there is no need to mark anything.

Figure 5: hints: mark all words of a contribution that you would consider as being indicators for stories or experiences using the layer `hints`.

3 Experience Type

There are two different types of experiences, one is *story* and the other is *experiential knowledge*.

3.1 STORY

Is the author **recounting a specific situation** that happened in the past and is this situation being acted out, that is, is a **chain of specific events** being recounted? Does the narrative have something like an introduction, a middle section, or a conclusion, this can for example be structured through the use of temporal adverbs, such as "once upon a time", "at the end", "at that time", "on X I was"…?

Example 3.1. I think the new law on extended opening hours on Sundays has advantages. Once my mother-in-law had announced herself in the morning for a short visit. I went directly to the supermarket, which was still open. Could buy all the ingredients for the cake and then home, the cake quickly in the oven. In the end, my mother in law was thrilled, and I was glad that I could still buy something that day.

The person from the example narrates **a concrete example**. The experience **follows a plot** which is stressed by the temporal adverbs that structure the story-line (*once, in the end*).

3.2 EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

The speakers use experiential knowledge to support a statement, **without creating an alternate scene and narration**. In contrast to story complex narratives, information is presented without a story-line evolving in time and space. The author makes a more general statement about having experience or **mentions the experience but does not recount it from beginning to the end**. It is not retelling an entire story line.

Example 3.2. As a teacher I have often seen how neglected children cause problems in the classroom.

In this example it becomes clear that the author has experiences because of being a teacher but these are not explicitly recounted. Figure 6 shows an example in inception with two different experiences and how to select the Experience Type for the second experience.

Figure 6: Document view: Annotate *experience type* for the layer *personal experience*

Keep in mind that length is not necessarily an indicator for a story but the main criterion is whether the experience is about a concrete event: *I flew from England to New Zealand and had to share my seat with my 3-year old child.* should be annotated as `STORY`, whereas *Whenever I fly I have to share my seat with my 3-year old child* should be marked as `EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE`.
Notes for clarification:

Figure 7: hypothetical: set this filed to 'yes' if the story or experience is clearly invented / made up / hypothetical.

A sequence should **be annotated as experience if ...**:

- ... the subject of the experience is someone else e.g. *"A friend of mine works in a bar and she always complains about..."*

- ... the recounted event did **not** happen, e.g. *"I've been to McDonald's several times and I've never had problems with my stomach after I ate there."*

- ... the story is a hypothetical story but only if it is clear that it is based on some experience, e.g. (*"sitting next to a dog would scare and frighten me a lot"*) but not (*"sitting next to a dog can scare or frighten people"*. In this case set the property `hypothetical` to **yes** (compare Figure 7).)

should not be annotated as experience if ...:

- ... the speaker has information from a non-human source, e.g. *I read in a book that people do X....*

- ... the experience is just a discussion about people having a certain opinion, e.g. *my friends think that X should not be done...* should not be marked as an experience, but *my friend told me, she had an accident where...* should be marked as experience.

4 Protagonist

Who is the story / experience about?

- `INDIVIDUAL` The main character of the experience is / are individuals.

- `GROUP` The main characters of the experience is a group of people.

- `NON-HUMAN` The main character is a non-human, for example an institution, a company or a country.

You should always annotate *Protagonist1*. This is the main character /experiencer. If there is more than one main character occurring in the experience that differs in the label (e.g. there is a group and in individual) use *Protagonist2* to be able to identify two different main characters. Otherwise set *Protagonist2* to `NONE`.
Notes for clarification:

- a `GROUP` is defined as a collective of several people that have a sense of unity and share similar characteristics (e.g. values, nationality, interests). Annotate the main character as a `GROUP` if the group is explicitly described or labelled with a name that expresses their group identity (e.g. 'the vegans', 'the dutch', 'the victims', 'the immigrants', 'the children')

5 Proximity to the narrator

- `FIRST-HAND` The author has the experience themselves

- `SECOND-HAND` The author knows someone who had the experience

- `OTHER` The authors do not explicitly state that they know the participants of the experience or that they had the experience themselves

6 Argumentative functions

In this step you will annotate the argumentative function of a story. The functions have been introduced by Maia et al. (2020) who investigated how rational reason-giving and telling stories and personal experiences influence the discussion in different contexts. Read the text you marked as being the personal experience and decide on one of the following functions. If you cannot understand the function of the experience or story in the context of the argument, select UNCLEAR.

6.1 CLARIFICATION

Through the story or personal experience in the argument, the authors clarify what position they take on the topic under discussion. The personal experience clarifies the motivation for an opinion or supports the argument of the discourse participant.

Example 6.1. As someone who grew up in nature and then moved to the city, I think the nature park should definitely be free. I think it is necessary to be able to to retreat to nature when you live in such a large city.

The story or personal experience can help the discourse participant to identify with existing groups (pointing out commonalities) or to stand out from them (pointing out differences).

Example 6.2. As an athlete, I definitely rely on the supplemental vitamins, so I benefit from a regulation that will make them available in supermarkets. I take about 5 different ones a day, so I am slightly above what the average consumer takes.

The story or personal experience can illustrate how a rule or law or certain aspects of the discourse topic effect everyday life.

Example 6.3. I tried a new counter like this last week. You have to enter your name and then answer a few questions. The price is calculated automatically. So for me the new counters worked pretty well, I'm happy.

6.2 ESTABLISH BACKGROUND

The participants mention experiential knowledge or share a story to emphasize that they are an 'expert' in the field or that they have the background to be able to reason about a problem. The goal can be to strengthen their credibility.

Example 6.4. I'm a swim trainer. I have worked in the Sacramento Swimming Pool for 5 years, both with children and young adults. Parents shouldn't be allowed to participate at the training sessions, they put too much pressure on the kids sometimes.

6.3 DISCLOSURE OF HARM

A negative experience is reported that was either made by the discourse participants themselves or that they can testify to and casts the experiencer as a victim. The experience highlights injustice or disadvantage. For example, the negative experience may describe some form of discrimination, oppression, violation of rights, exploitation, or stigmatization.

Example 6.5. When I'm out with white friends, I'm often the only one asked for ID by the police. And if you say something against it, they take you to the police station. I often feel so powerless.

Example 6.6. When my friend told them at work that he can no longer work so many hours because of his burn out, they asked him why he was so lazy. He told me that hurts a lot and now he doesn't dare to talk about it openly.

6.4 SEARCH FOR SOLUTION

A positive experience is reported that can serve as an example of how a particular rule can be implemented or adapted. It may indicate suggestions of what should or should not be done to achieve a solution to the problem. The experience may indicate a compromise.

Example 6.7. When I was at this restaurant and they introduced the new regulation that you have to give your address and your name once you enter the restaurant, the owner of this place gave a QR-code at the entrance which you could just scan and it would automatically fill in your details. I think this can save a lot of time.

Decision Rules:

- If you cannot decide between an experience being `CLARIFICATION` or `ESTABLISH BACKGROUND`, pick `ESTABLISH BACKGROUND`.

- If you cannot decide between an experience being `DISCLOSURE OF HARM` or `CLARIFICATION`, pick `DISCLOSURE OF HARM`.

- If you are uncertain about `CLARIFICATION` or `SEARCH FOR SOLUTION` select `SEARCH FOR SOLUTION`.

It can happen that an experience needs to be split into two parts because the parts have different functions. If so, **split the experience into several parts** and mark each with the corresponding function, e.g. [1]:*I used to go to the cinema in town quite often*[2]:*Since they changed the program to more alternative movies, I stopped going there. I prefer mainstream over arthouse.* Part [1] should be annotated as `ESTABLISH BACKGROUND` and part [2] as `CLARIFICATION`.

7 Emotional load

Assess the emotional load of the experience / story and rate it with one of the following levels:

- `LOW`

- `MEDIUM`

- `HIGH`

As a reference level have a look at the following examples, one experience for each level of emotional load.
LOW:

Example 7.1. In my country we have a tax that regulates selling and buying alcohol and tobacco in order to prevent to reduce the consumption of these.

MEDIUM:

Example 7.2. My friend told me she went to the new cinema in the city center the other day and she was like super impressed about the selection of different popcorn flavours they had. She told me they even have salted caramel, which is my favourite flavour. A ban on selling flavoured popcorn would diminish the fun of going to the cinema.

HIGH:

Example 7.3. I was riding my bike and suddenly this dog came from behind and jumped at my bike like crazy. I screamed and was terrified, but the owner just said "he does nothing, he just wants to play". After that, I no longer dared to go to this park.

8 Effectiveness of the experience

Do you think the story or the experience supports the argument of the author and makes the contribution stronger? Rate the effectiveness of the experience within the argument on a scale from 'low' to 'high'.

- `LOW`

- `MEDIUM`

- `HIGH`

Try to asses this regardless of whether you agree with the author's position, but rather whether the story / experience helps you better understand the author's perspective.

References

R. C. M. Maia, D. Cal, J. Bargas, and N. J. B. Crepalde. Which types of reason-giving and storytelling are good for deliberation? assessing the discussion dynamics in legislative and citizen forums. *European Political Science Review*, 12(2):113–132, 2020. doi: 10.1017/S1755773919000328.