

Discourse Coherence

Instructor: Jackie CK Cheung

COMP-550

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J&M Ch. 18.2, 18.3 (1st); J&M Ch. 21.1, 21.2
(2nd); Barzilay and Lapata, 2008

Coherence

A property of a discourse that “makes sense” – there is some logical structure or meaning in the discourse that causes it to hang together.

Coherent:

Indoor climbing is a good form of exercise.

It gives you a whole-body workout.

Incoherent:

Indoor climbing is a good form of exercise.

Rabbits are cute and fluffy.

Cohesion

The use of linguistic devices to tie together text units

Ontario's Liberal government is proposing new regulations that would ban the random stopping of citizens by police.

The new rules say police officers cannot arbitrarily or randomly stop and question citizens.

Officers must also inform a citizen that a stop is voluntary and they have the right to walk away.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/carding-regulations-ontario-1.3292277>

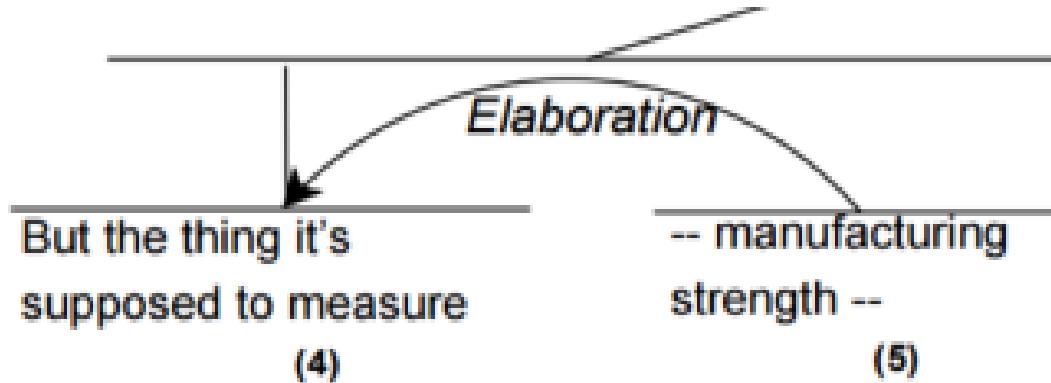
Rhetorical Structure Theory

(Mann and Thomson, 1988)

Describes the structure of a discourse by:

1. Segmenting text into **elementary discourse units (EDUs)**
2. Relating spans of text to each other according to a set of **rhetorical relations**
 - Elaboration
 - Attribution
 - Contrast
 - List
 - Background
 - ...

Elaboration



One EDU gives more information about another EDU
Note that the relation is **asymmetric**:

There is a **nucleus** (4)

and a **satellite** (5)

Attribution

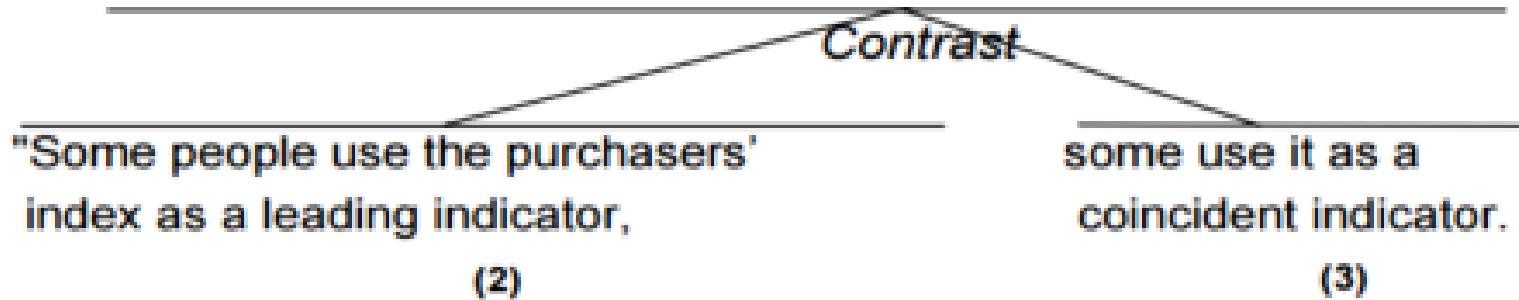
Gives source of information for reported information

[*S Analysts estimated*] [*N that sales declined*]

S Satellite

N Nucleus

Contrast



This particular instance is **symmetric**.

- Both EDUs are **nuclei**.

But other contrasts may be asymmetric.

List

A list of items without contrast or explicit comparison

[N *This student studies computer science;*] [N *that one studies linguistics*]

Symmetric, multi-nuclear

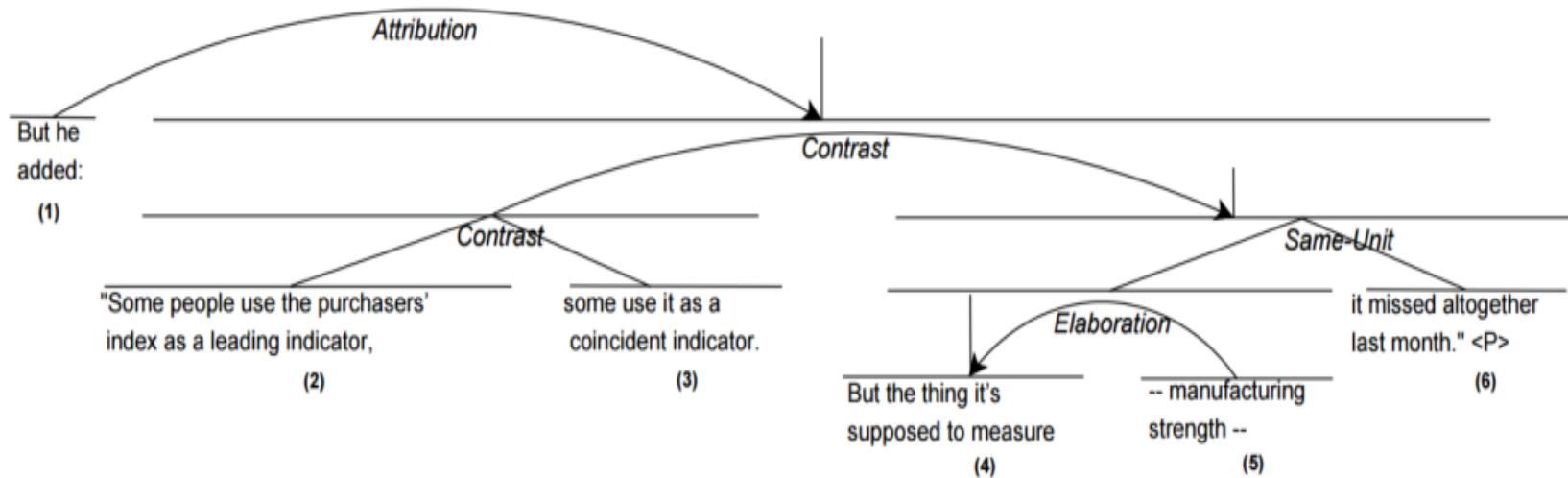
Background

Asymmetric

[N *The man asked me for directions to the university.*]

[S *He was new in town.*]

Example of a Full RST Tree



From Joty et al., (2013)

Applications of RST

People often extract features from RST parse trees to use in downstream applications.

e.g., automatic essay grading

RST is also helpful in automatic summarization.

Marcu (2000) defined heuristics that exploit the asymmetrical structure of RST parse trees to determine the summary content.

Bootstrapping

Explicit discourse cues often signal a certain rhetorical relation

- *consequently* RESULT
- *in other words* SUMMARY
- *for example* ELABORATION

This suggests a method to automatically acquire data to recognize when the rhetorical relations are expressed *implicitly*.

RST Parsing

Usually decomposed into the following steps:

Segmentation of text into EDUs

Recovering the parse structure, with labels

How would you solve this problem?

- How would you decompose the steps?
- What models and algorithms would you use to solve each step?

Local Coherence Modelling (LCM)

RST builds up a global parse tree, representing the coherence of an entire passage.

Local coherence modelling (Barzilay and Lapata, 2005) emphasizes local cohesive devices that are used to capture coherence between adjacent sentences.

The Life and Death of an Entity

Mentions of entities in a document tend to follow certain patterns (Centering Theory also relies on this):

First mention: often the subject

Justin Pierre James Trudeau MP (born December 25, 1971) is a Canadian politician and the prime minister of Canada. ...

Mention clusters – an entity will often appear multiple times within one part of an article, then disappear

... The others are Ben Mulroney (son of Brian Mulroney), Catherine Clark (daughter of Joe Clark), and Trudeau's younger brother, Alexandre. Ben Mulroney was a guest at Trudeau's wedding. ...

Ben Mulroney does not appear anywhere else in the article

Entity Grid Model

Make an **entity grid** that plots entity mentions, indicate the syntactic role in which that entity appears:

Table 1

A fragment of the entity grid. Noun phrases are represented by their head nouns. Grid cells correspond to grammatical roles: subjects (s), objects (o), or neither (x).

Department	Trial	Microsoft	Evidence	Competitors	Markets	Products	Brands	Case	Netscape	Software	Tactics	Government	Suit	Earnings	
1	s	o	s	x	o	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
2	-	-	o	-	-	x	s	o	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
3	-	-	s	o	-	-	-	-	s	o	o	-	-	-	3
4	-	-	s	-	-	-	-	-	-	s	-	-	-	-	4
5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	s	o	-	-	5
6	-	x	s	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	o	-	6

(Barzilay and Lapata, 2008)

Document Representation

Extract a feature vector representation of a document by taking the relative frequencies of entity mention transitions (i.e., in the style of N-gram models)

Table 3

Example of a feature-vector document representation using all transitions of length two given syntactic categories **S**, **O**, **X**, and **-**.

	S S	S O	S X	S -	O S	O O	O X	O -	X S	X O	X X	X -	- S	- O	- X	--
d_1	.01	.01	0	.08	.01	0	0	.09	0	0	0	.03	.05	.07	.03	.59
d_2	.02	.01	.01	.02	0	.07	0	.02	.14	.14	.06	.04	.03	.07	0.1	.36
d_3	.02	0	0	.03	.09	0	.09	.06	0	0	0	.05	.03	.07	.17	.39

Exercise

Build an entity grid and document representation (up to bigram transitions) for the following short passage.

Demonstrators were gathering again Saturday in cities across the United States for protests against Donald Trump.

They say he will threaten their civil and human rights.

Rallies were scheduled throughout the day in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago.

Evaluations

1. Distinguish original ordering of a document from a version where the ordering of the sentences has been randomly permuted:
 - ~90% accuracy (What is the expected random accuracy?)
2. Evaluate whether one summary is more coherent than another summary
 - ~83% pairwise accuracy
3. Readability assessment: Distinguish *Encyclopedia Britannica* from *Britannica Elementary*.
 - 88.79% accuracy, in conjunction with a pre-existing model for this task.

Extensions

Combining global and local coherence

(Elsner et al., 2007)

Modelling entity relatedness

(Filippova and Strube, 2007)

Other languages than English

(Cheung and Penn, 2010)

Neural coherence model

(Nguyen and Joty, 2017)