Concern-Alignment for Negotiation and Joint Inquiry in Dialogues

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Abstract

‘Concern Alignment in Conversations’ project aims, through empirical examinations of real-life conversations, to establish a theoretical and descriptive framework to capture discourse structures and underlying rational and affective processes in human-human joint planning interactions at dialogue act exchange level. Concern alignment model has been developed to address convergent negotiation for consensus-building and open-ended joint exploration for maximal satisfaction of participants observed in real-life dialogues.

1 Concern alignment

Concern align model (Katagiri et al., 2013; Katagiri et al., 2015) of dialogues assumes that real-life dialogues, which almost always involve some form of consensus decision-making, consist of two conceptually distinguishable processes: concern alignment and proposal exchange (Figure 1). A group of people, when engaging in a conversation to pursue a joint course of actions among themselves on certain objectives (issues), start by expressing what they deem relevant on the properties and criteria on the actions to be settled on (concerns). When they find that sufficient level of alignment of their concerns is attained, they proceed to propose and negotiate on concrete choice of actions (proposals) to form a joint action plan. For speech acts performed by utterances, we stipulate a set of dialogue acts at the level of concern alignment in terms of functions a discourse segment perform in consensus-building (Table 1).

2 Convergent negotiation for consensus-building

We collected and analyzed medical consultation dialogues between obesity patients and nurses. The main purpose of the consultation was to come up with patient life-style improvement plans. We observed that in most of the sessions, the nurse sequentially tried out improvement suggestions for patients by selecting out of predetermined set

Figure 1: A concern alignment model for dialogue structures in consensus-building conversations.

Table 1: Discourse acts in concern alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern alignment</th>
<th>Proposal exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C-solicit</td>
<td>P-solicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-introduce</td>
<td>P-introduce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-eval/positive</td>
<td>P-accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-eval/negative</td>
<td>P-reject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-elaborate</td>
<td>P-elaborate</td>
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of potential life-style improvement routes and by making adjustments based on patients feedbacks. This type of convergent negotiations can be captured by the exchange of concerns and their evaluations followed by exchange of proposals and their acceptances (Figure 2).

3 Joint exploration of concern space

Business consultation dialogues between entrepreneur candidates and venture capital consultants tend to have a lot of room for potential concerns to be considered beyond obvious factors such as production method, cost or target market. Dialogues often go back and forth between concerns and proposals, reflecting the exploratory nature of identifying relevant concerns to put together a successful business proposal. Concerns are not only employed to support or to criticize proposals, but they can also be employed to clarify goals and to direct the course of breaking down of proposals, e.g., by presenting multiple choices between competing concerns (Figure 3).

Newly introduced concerns provide enrichment to the structures of potential space of concerns, and invite participants to jointly advance toward successful and concrete proposals. Concern alignment captures the dynamics of concern space exploration.

4 Future Directions

We have identified two contrasting processes in consensus-building dialogues. We believe the concept of multi-issue negotiation (Traum et al., 2008; Katagiri et al., 2014) can be applied to provide a computational underpinning to the process of convergent negotiation. We are working on the development of computational models for joint concern space exploration.

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References


