1. Introduction

We are interested in exploring when disagreement is productive and how this relates to shifts in stance. Disagreement is understood to be socially problematic and a potentially face-threatening manoeuvre. An experiment was designed to ascertain what effect the insertion of disagreement fragments into a discussion dialogue might have, and how this compared to the insertion of agreement fragments. What effect does increased levels of exposed agreement and disagreement have on the potential for shifts in stance?

2. Politeness

- We explore how agreement and disagreement are presented in dialogue and how politeness impacts on this.
- Qualitative studies show that people avoid exposed disagreement in conversation.
- This is normally attributed to politeness strategies that mitigate the face-threat involved in directly challenging or disagreeing with a conversational partner.
- Disagreement is rare and is viewed as socially problematic in everyday conversation.

3. Disagreement

- We are interested in how we can locate shifts in stance within a dialogue. Disagreement may be viewed as socially problematic, however, it can also be very productive!
- Disagreement is the process by which different stances on a given topic are negotiated in dialogue, thus, the focus of our enquiries is on the articulation of (dis)agreement.
- Previous studies on disagreement take a distributional or corpus based approach at evidencing and analysing instances of disagreement in interaction (Walker et al. 2012; Abbott et al., 2011; Holtgraves, 1997).
- However, exposed disagreement rarely surfaces in naturally occurring conversation. Therefore, we outline an experimental approach for investigating disagreement, which provides opportunity to manipulate the occurrence of exposed (dis)agreement in dialogue.

4. Investigating the effect of (dis)agreement using a Chat tool

- An experiment was designed to see how (dis)agreement markers influence people’s responses to co-conversants in a discussion context. 60 participants were recruited in pairs, Pairs of participants were presented with a discussion task and instructed to discuss for 30 minutes using a chat tool.

- The discussion task presents a scenario of a failing hot air balloon that must lose one passenger in order to avoid a crash. The participants must discuss and attempt to agree on who should be sacrificed.

- The three experiment conditions were:
  - Control Condition: No interventions
  - Disagreement Condition: Turn-Initial Disagreement Token Insertion (E.g. “You’re wrong”, “I disagree”)
  - Agreement Condition: Turn-Initial Agreement Token Insertion (E.g. “You’re right”)

Findings

Explicit agreement insertions resulted in delayed responses to nearly the same degree as the insertions of explicit disagreement. This suggests that drawing agreement or disagreement into the topic under discussion is disconcerting or troubling.

Exposed disagreement was more likely to provoke clarification requests and lead to extended discussion of the topic of disagreement, whereas agreement was less directly addressed in the dialogue.

5. References


Acknowledgement

This work is supported by the EPSRC Media & Arts Technology Doctoral Training Centre and Cognitive Science Research Group.