Symposium on Questions, Discourse and Dialogue: 20 years after *Making it Explicit*

The ability to use language and, more specifically, engage in dialogue has been trumpeted as a good indicator of general intelligent behaviour since Turing (1950). Language use also features prominently in accounts of rationality by philosophers such as Hamblin, Brandom and Davidson. In Brandom's 'Making It explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment ', published 20 years ago, the ability to take part in a game of 'giving and asking for reasons' is identified as the hallmark of sapient, rather than merely sentient, creatures.

The purpose of the current symposium is to bring two strands of thought together: On the one hand there is ground-breaking foundational work on language and rationality, as exemplified by Brandom's large, complex and difficult contribution to the philosophy of language. Jürgen Habermas has likened his 'Making It Explicit' to Rawls' Theory of Justice in terms of its scope and importance within its field. On the other hand, there is research on formal and computational models of dialogue and discourse by researchers in Artificial Intelligence, and specifically Natural Language Processing and Computational Linguistics. It is fair to say that the former has so far had little direct influence on computational or formal approaches to language, though some partial formalisations have been offered by Lance and Kremer, Kibble and Piwek.

The symposium is loosely organised around various themes arising from Brandom's work, or questions provoked by it. As noted, Brandom sees the game of 'giving and asking for reasons' as central to human rationality or sapience, but it turns out that he has rather little to say about questions or any other speech acts apart from assertion. Brandom stresses the importance of shared 'material' inferences for successful communication; though it is far from clear how this common background understanding could be encoded in a computer system.

We are especially grateful to Ruth Kempson for agreeing to give an invited talk in which she argues for the idea of language as mechanisms for interaction, and reflects on the significance of this stance for what goes on between saying and doing. The symposium proceedings contain the nine regular papers that were given at the symposium.

The first group of regular papers at the symposium directly addresses aspects of Brandom's work. Kibble's paper examines a notion that sits at the core of Brandom's proposal, that of a discursive practice. He compares and contrasts Brandom's notion with Bourdieu's concept of a practice and draws some lessons from this. In particular, he urges more engagement with the psychological dimension involved in Brandom's games of 'giving and asking for reasons' to avoid the peril of 'drowning the pragmatist baby in analytic bath-water'. Rainey further problematizes Brandom's proposal, by arguing that discursive practices in Brandom's sense fall foul of criteria for a genuinely rational framework. In particular, the members of a community that sustain a discursive practice in Brandom's sense are limited in the ways that they can criticise and reform the practices of that very community. Millson continues this critical appraisal, by arguing that Brandom's purely assertional

practices need to be supplemented with normative pragmatic analysis of queries. Skovgaard Olsen carefully examines Brandom's distinction between consequential and acknowledged commitments and concludes that the move from private beliefs to public commitments opens up the possibility of accounting for a range of problems that have been associated with belief talk. Finally, Piwek reviews the pros and cons of truth-conditional semantics, and argues that there are good grounds for exploring an alternative 'inferentialist' approach inspired by Brandom's work. The technical section proceeds with a proof-theoretic formalisation of such an approach, including an explicit treatment of non-monotonic , i.e. defeasible, inference.

The second group of papers continues the key themes that run through the first group - assertions, questions, and (non-monotonic) inference - but with more emphasis on the Natural Language Processing and practical applications, rather than the philosophical foundations. Breitholtz focuses on defeasible non-monotonic inference in conversation. Her paper takes Aristotle's notion of topoi, as elaborated by Anscombre and Ducrot, and provides a partial formalisation in terms of dialogue game boards and type theory with records. Power investigates dialogue moves, including assertion, retraction and questions, from the practical point of view of an interactive authoring system for Semantic Web ontologies, drawing on some of Hamblin's insights. Stoyanchev, Liu and Hirschberg focus on a particular type of questions: clarification questions. They describe and evaluate a system that can generate clarification question that go beyond generic 'please repeat/rephrase' questions. Finally, Thompson, Howes and McCabe examine the use declarative questions, i.e. questions that are expressed with declarative sentences, in psychiatry. Using a conversational analytical approach, they arrive at a more fine-grained classification of questioning practices in clinical interaction.

We would like to thank the programme committee members (listed below) for reviewing the submissions to symposium.

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