Bridging Question Answering and Discourse: The case of Multi-Sentence Questions

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Abstract

In human question-answering (QA), questions are often expressed in the form of multiple sentences. One can see this in both spoken QA interactions, when one person asks a question of another, and written QA, such as are found on-line in FAQs and in what are called "Community Question-Answering Forums".

Computer-based QA has taken the challenge of these "multi-sentence questions" to be that of breaking them into an appropriately ordered sequence of separate questions, with both the previous questions and their answers serving as context for the next question. This can be seen, for example, in two recent workshops at AAAI called "Reasoning for Complex QA" [https://rcqa-ws.github.io/program/].

We claim that, while appropriate for some types of "multi-sentence questions" (MSQs), it is not appropriate for all, because they are essentially different types of discourse. To support this claim, we need to provide evidence that:

- different types of MSQs are answered differently in written or spoken QA between people;
- people can (and do) distinguish these different types of MSQs;
- systems can be made to both distinguish different types of MSQs and provide appropriate answers.