

Listening In *

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Abstract.

Communicating agents are commonly thought of as intentionally addressing messages to other agents. A growing body of research exists on the interactive case: natural language dialogue. A somewhat different case, also important in many real life social and work settings, is a person overhearing or intentionally listening in on dialogue among a group of other people. Comparatively little research so far illuminates how, for example, a minute taker for a meeting can comprehend a discussion well enough to accurately record decisions, action items, and other such meeting outcomes, including ones that concern technical matters he does not understand. What prevents the small misunderstandings that frequently creep into discussions, even between active participants, from growing into a gross misunderstanding by the minute taker of the discussion to which he is listening?

This talk will present some similarities and differences between participating in a conversation and listening in on one, with emphasis on how overhearers who lack opportunities to contribute to a discussion target their interpretive efforts in productive ways. Progress in creating artificial agents capable of similar listening feats will be surveyed and research directions assessed.

Keywords: dialogue, multiple speakers, overhearing, meetings.

References

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