Internet Commentators as Dialogue Participants: Coherence Achieved through Membership Categorization

Tiit Hennoste, Olga Gerassimenko,

Riina Kasterpalu, Mare Koit,
Kirsi Laanesoo, Anni Oja,

Andriela Rääbis, Krista Strandson

University of Tartu & University of Tallinn

Riga, 8.10.2010

TALLINNA ÜLIKOOL

Research subject and aim of the study

Dialogue:
- Opinion article (source text)
- Comments (reactions)
- to the source text
- to previous comment(s)

-> multilayered, though linearly organized dialogue structure

Aim of the study:
- how an inherent dialogue structure, cohesion and coherence are formed in collaboration of commentators.

Data

Case study:
- opinion text + its comments (total number 171),

„Unemployed lose hope or leave Estonia"
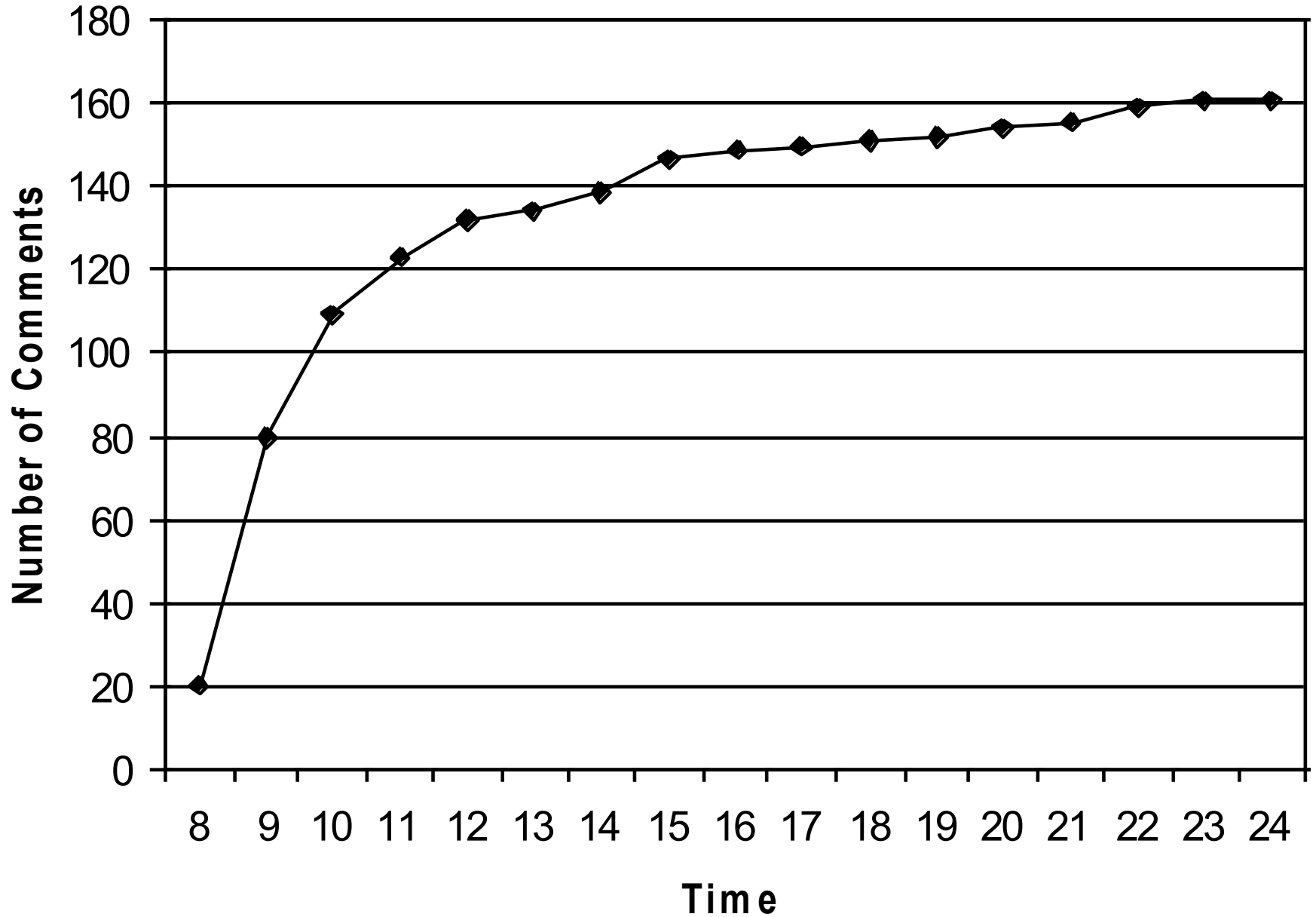   published: Estonian Internet portal Delfi, 15.01.2010

Topic:
- Unemployment

Agents:
- Kadri Simson (a woman, a member of a left-side opposition party, the chairperson of the parliament fraction)
- Taavi Rõivas (a man, a member of the liberal government party, the chairman of the financial commission of the parliament)

Number of comments during the first day

Method

- **Conversation Analysis (CA)**

  analysis of the microstructure of conversation that tries to show how a conversation is running and how it is keeping its coherence due to cooperation of participants through turn taking, sequence organization, repair and action formation

- **Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA)**

  method that investigates how people categorize themselves and other participants of a conversation and how they use this categorization in conversation stressing certain properties and making them relevant for other participants

Cohesion through Adjacency Pairs (APs)

AP: two dialogue acts where the first pair part is expecting the certain kind of second pair part from the partner (e.g., question-answer)

•*Source text* – statement/opinion: **first pair part**

•*Comments* – (dis)agreement etc: **second pair parts**; at the same time statements/opinions, treated by the next comments as **first pair parts**

(ex.1.)
Naljakas, 15.01.2010 07:13
on lugeda nende eluvõõraste ametnikukeste lastemulinat:)…
Funny, 15.01.2010 07:13
is to read that childish mumble of those little ignorant clerks:)…

kuule lollike Naljakas, 15.01.2010 07:20
mida sa siin hommiku vara plõksid…
listen you, dummy Funny, 15.01.2010 07:20
what do you twaddle here early in the morning /--/

Cohesion through APs

- 83% of commentators take a turn only once relating their comments to the source text or to previous comments

- 62% of comments is related to the source text

- 20% of them are directly related to the agents of the source text using their names as a cohesive device
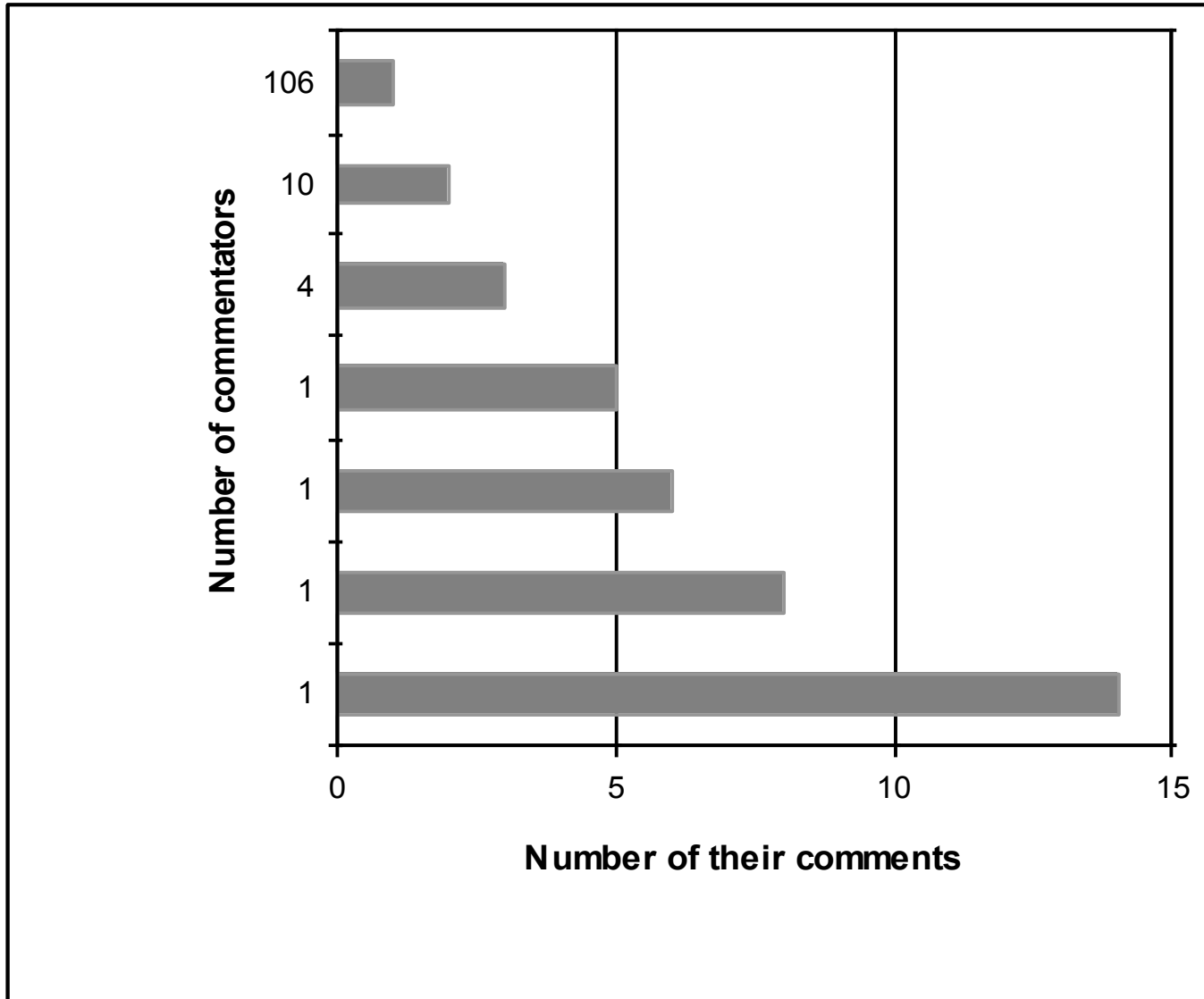
(ex.2.)

töötult Kadrile, 15.01.2010 07:32

just, väga õige pealkiri artiklil.

from an unemployed to Kadri, 15.01.2010 07:32

right, the article has a proper title.

Number of comments produced by the same commentators

Cohesion through APs

- 36% of comments relate themselves to other comments (ex. 1, Funny – listen you dummy Funny)

- 2% of comments react at the same time both to the source text as well as to some of the previous comment(s)

(ex. 3: the reaction comment)

Allan, 15.01.2010 09:20

Ja soovitus inimestele kes kahtlevad , kas minna välismaale elama ja tööle. Minge südame rahus /--/ (Kodumaa ei ole seal kus oled sündinud ,vaid seal kus on hea elada)

__And__ a recommendation to people who doubt __whether to go to live and work abroad__. Go with a peaceful heart /--/ (__Homeland__ is not where you are born but where it is nice to live)

(ex. 3, the stimuli in the previous utterances)

1. *Allan, 15.01.2010 09:16 (roughly: government and its insensible legislation is responsible for the situation)*

2. Source text – *Unemployed lose hope or <u>leave Estonia</u>*

2. Karuott, 15.01.2010 09:09

Miks peaks Eestist lahkuma? /--/ Kadrike, sinu jaoks siin ilmselt väärtusi ei ole, nagu ka sinu valijate jaoks, kuid eestlasele on omaette väärtuseks juba kodumaal elamine.

Backwoodsman, 15.01.2010 09:09

Why should one leave Estonia? /--/ Little Kadri, for you there is obviously no value here as well as for your voters, but for an Estonian life in <u>the homeland</u> is a value per se.

...

Structure of the dialogue

- Only 17% of commentators take a turn more than once (2-14 times)

- Longest subdialogue: source text and 3 comments (not immediately following each other)

- Mostly minimal sequences of single APs:

source text – comment 1,

source text – comment 2

- Result: "bunch" of microdialogues (formed by a single AP) and longer subdialogues.

Cohesion through membership categorization

The commentators present their own picture of the conversation subject, confrontations, positive and negative understandings. To do so, they categorize politicians and themselves.

Membership categorization:

- topic-relevant,

- institution-relevant,

- communication-relevant.

Sets of categories (topic-relevant)

- *Homeland*

local people – living abroad,
people who valuate home – nomads,
patriots – people who valuate good life abroad

- *Unemployment*

people who discuss – offenders,
people holding together – scrappers,
(active) people forging ahead – (passive) whiners,
participants – observers,
winners – losers,
young – old,
educated – uneducated

Sets of categories (institution-relevant)

- *Party and ideology*

opposition party – government party,
politicians – non-politicians,
left-side ideology – right-side ideology

- *State and folk*

officials – non-officials,

gradual taxes – equal taxes,

people who trust themselves – people who hope that the state will help them,

the state as a robber – a person as a victim who pays taxes,

rich people – poor people,

slaves – gentry,

employer – employee,

unemployed – employee,

waster – economical

Cohesion through sets of categories

- The categorizations are not random but form a collection of categories related to each other and constructed dynamically in the process of interaction.

- The collections create coherence relations between the sets of comments that adds one additional structure layer to the discontinuous dialogue

- The cohesion of turns is structured both linearly and non-linearly.

Conclusions

Dialogue structure:

- Many parallel micro-dialogues, most of them consisting from one AP, and some consisting of sequences of 3-4 dialogue acts (all the acts can be considered as opinions or statements)

- The structure of the dialogue is dynamically shaped by the interrelated reactions of participants.

Cohesion through categorization:

- Besides the linear micro-dialogue structure there is an additional structure layer formed by the complex category sets built by participants.

- As a result, the coherence of turns is also structured non-linearly.

Thank you for attention!

Questions are welcome.

References

- J. Sidnell, *Conversation Analysis. An Introduction,* Wiley & Sons, Sussex, 2010.

- E. A. Schegloff, *Sequence Organization in Interaction. A Primer in Conversation Analysis* 1 Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 2007.

- C. W Butler, R. Fitzgerald, R. Gardner, Branching out. Ethnomethodological approaches to communication, *Australian Journal of Communication* 36**/**3 (2009). Retrieved June 22, 2010, from aiemca.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/-Branching-Out.pdf.

- E. A Schegloff, Categories in action: person-reference and membership categorization, *Discourse Studies* 9**/**4 (2007), 433-461.

- H. Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.

- M.A.K. Halliday, R.Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, Longman, London, 1976.

- T. Hennoste, O. Gerassimenko, R. Kasterpalu, M. Koit, K. Laanesoo, A. Oja, A. Rääbis, K. Strandson,. The Structure of a Discontinuous Dialogue Formed by Internet Comments. Sojka, Petr; Horak, Ales; Kopecek, Ivan; Pala, Karel (eds). *Text, Speech and Dialogue. 13th International Conference, TSD 2010.* Brno, Czech Republic, September 2010. Lecture Notes in Computer Science (in press).