

Contextualising Contrastive Discourse Relations: Evidence from single-authored and co-constructed texts

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0. Introduction

0.1 Goals

1. **Context** in the **production of discourse**, discourse processing and **construal of discourse coherence** with a focus on **contrastive discourse relations**

1. Linguistic realization

1. Encoded
2. Signalled

2. Production format

1. Single-authored (media text; skeleton text)
2. Dyadically co-constructed (skeleton text)

0. Introduction

0.2 Context

- Linguistic context (or co-text)
- Social (and sociocultural) context
 - S-p-e-a-k-i-n-g grid (Hymes 1974)
- Cognitive context
 - *Context as other minds* (Givón 2005)
-> discourse common ground
- Contextualisation as a universal in human communication (Gumperz 1996)
- Entextualisation
 - Unbounded context assigned the status of a bounded object (-> context importation)

0. Introduction

0.2 Context

- Dynamic
- Relational
 - “structured context also occurs within a wider context - a metacontext if you will - and that this sequence of contexts is an open, and conceivably infinite, series” (Bateson 1972: 245)
 - Context must be repeatable otherwise there would be no learning (cf. Bateson 1972: 289, 292)
 - Context markers
 - Context can be restructured otherwise there would be no change – and no learning

0. Introduction

0.3 Natural-language communication

- **Discourse is communicative action**
 - Discourse contains context
 - Discourse is contained in context
- **Delimited by communicative formats**
 - Constraints and requirements
 - Production / interpretation of constitutive parts
 - Production / interpretation of whole
- Discourse comes in with the presumption of being – more or less – coherent

0. Introduction

0.4 Methodology

- Integrated framework
 - Discourse pragmatics
 - Rationality, intentionality and cooperation
 - Discourse grammar
 - Multilayeredness
 - Segmented Discourse Representation Theory
 - (Contrastive) Discourse relations
 - Interactional linguistics
 - Contextualization
 - Indexicality of communicative action
 - Linguistic variation and alternation are not random or arbitrary, but communicatively functional and meaningful

0. Introduction

0.5 ToC

1. Contrastive Discourse relations
2. Data and method
3. Results and discussion
4. Conclusions

1. Discourse relations in context

- Discourse relation as a logical connection between a proposition p^1 as part of a discourse D and some other proposition p^2 in D (Asher & Lascarides 2003)
 - **Contrast:** semantic dissimilarity between p^2 and p^1
 - **Contrastive Elaboration:** semantic dissimilarity with the topic of p^2 specifying the topic of p^1 or one of more of its referents mereologically
 - Encoded in coherence strands
 - topic and referential continuity; temporal and aspectual coherence; lexical coherence
 - Signalled
 - Discourse connectives; metacommunicative comments; pragmatic word order

1. Contrastive discourse relations

- Discourse as a parts-whole configuration
- Discourse unit
 - Doubly contextual (Heritage 1984)
 - A semantic and pragmatic relation to (at least) one other discourse unit
 - Carrier of content, force and metadiscursive meaning

2. Data, method, results

Data

Analysed for the coding and signalling of discourse relations

- Public media texts
- Experimental data
 - Editing-based task: monadic and dyadically co-constructed
 - skeleton text with minimal propositional information
 - participants were to create a well-formed argumentative text
 - Dyads' negotiations recorded and transcribed
- Goals
 - (Systematic) variation between different realisations of identical discourse-relation potentials
 - Discourse genre as a blueprint
 - Sociocognitive construct of discourse common ground with intended readers of the 'well-formed text'

2. Data, method, results

Data

- Public media texts (*The Guardian*)
 - **Contrast** and **Corrective Elaboration** both encoded and signalled
 - contrastive discourse connectives (primarily *but*) throughout the data
 - sometimes intensified with *pragmatic word order*
- Experimental setting texts (based on 'skeleton text')
 - **Contrast** and **Corrective Elaboration** both encoded and signalled
 - contrastive discourse connectives, pragmatic word order and additional entextualised contextual information
- Think-aloud protocols of the dyads' negotiations of discursive well-formedness
 - Similar signals and encodings of contrastive relations

2. Data, method, results

- **Contrast**
 - **But**: most frequent connective across the data
 - Monadic texts: more variation in signalling Contrast
 - **While**: contrastive and temporal
- **Corrective Elaboration**
 - **However**: most frequent connective across the data
 - Monadic texts: more variation in signalling Corrective Elaboration
 - **Yet, despite, instead of, though, although, not just,**
 - metacommunicative comments: **even better, surprisingly**
- Semantic dissimilarity encoded in coherence strands
 - Referential / topic (dis)continuity
 - **Shift in temporal / aspectual continuity**
 - **Lexical coherence** (antonymic relations)
- Degree of contrastiveness intensified in editing tasks

2. Data, method, results

Argumentative skeleton text and instructions

The following 15 clauses form the backbone of a commentary from the Guardian. You may add or delete any linguistic material which you consider necessary to transform the current text into a well-formed coherent whole, but you may not change the order of the given clauses.

The solitary monoglots

- 1 the British seem set on isolation from the world
- 2 **London was a dowdy place of tea-houses and stale rock cakes**
- 3 **it's much more exciting**
- 4 I can hear people speaking in all the languages of the world
- 5 was that Pashto or Hindi
- 6 I can just about differentiate Polish from Lithuanian
- 7 **I delight in hearing them mingled with snatches of French, German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese...**
- 8 **London has become the capital of linguistic diversity**
- 9 **one important group seems to be leaving itself out**
- 10 **students**

3. Discussion

- Discourse relations can be realised with various degrees of specification
- **Contrastive discourse relations** are both encoded and signalled throughout the data
 - Multiply signalled in the editing data
 - Contrastive discourse connective + pragmatic word order
 - Intensified with additional encoded material

Contrast

#2/2 *In the past*, London *was* a DOWDY place of tea-houses and STALE rockcakes,

#2/3 **but** *now* it's MUCH MORE EXCITING.

#1/7a **While** some Londoners *might find* these foreign tongues THREATENING,

#1/7b I *DELIGHT* in hearing them mingled with snatches of French, German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese ...

3. Discussion

B₁:{05:24} so here it says see also **this is present** | and **then**
London was a dowdy place **but now and now** *it's much*
more exciting **so we have put this in the right context so**
we could start with the british **had seemed** or **in the past**
(2s)

B₁:{06:31} erm (2s) erm (3s) i wrote i used now already see **but**
now *it's much more exciting* | **but today** how about
today's *much more exciting* now how about if we do that
but today

A₁: mhm *but today it's*

B₁: *much more exciting* now walking

3. Discussion

Corrective Elaboration

#2/8 Some would argue that London *HAS BECOME* the capital of linguistic diversity.

#2/9 **However**, one important group *seems to be LEAVING ITSELF OUT*:

#3/8 **Surprisingly**, London *HAS BECOME* the capital of linguistic diversity.

#3/9 **However**, one important group which *seems to be EXCLUDING* {skeleton text: 'leaving'} *ITSELF* {skeleton text: 'out'}

3. Discussion

A₂: yeah but otherwise how would you link it?

B₂: yeah

A₂: i could just well I mean I'm just thinking |

B₂: well I well ok i can you know or (5s) ok yeah &&& [stuttering] **it is a contrast because this is ah**|

A₂: she can do this because she can do that|

B₂: because she can yeah |

A₂: (3s) i'm changing the text &&& [mumbling] **however one**

B₂: &&& (mumbling) **namely** students

A₂: (3s) **it's a bit weird with like in fact and then however**

B₂: yeah

A₂: it's like | **a bit too much** |

B₂: mhm mhm **well just leave it out in fact**

A₂: yeah (5s) **it's like overdoing the transition** | a bit|

B₁: {08:01} ok and how about *london has become the capital of linguistic diversity* &&& **surprisingly we need something in there | we need an adverb in there surprisingly** or i don't know

A₁: yeah yeah let's put in surprisingly

3. Discussion

Contrastive discourse relations in argumentative discourse

- Encoding and (multiple) signalling seems to be the default
 - ‘structural overspecification’ as an attention-guiding device
 - Speakers intend to secure the speaker-intended interpretation of contrastive discourse relations
 - signal a change in the flow of discourse

3. Discussion

Construal of discourse coherence / construction of discourse common ground

- Dynamic construct (→ grounding and discourse processing)
- Negotiated and updated continuously
 - Confirmed
 - **Modified**
 - **Restructured (-> by storing new information and by updating already stored information)**

Contrastive discourse relations

- local impact on the administration of discourse common ground
- Possible restructuring of less dynamic types of discourse common ground (-> learning and change)

4. Conclusion

Contrastive discourse relations

- Contextualisation of semantic dissimilarity
 - Coherence strands (en-/decoding)
 - Discourse connectives, metacommunicative comments, pragmatic word order (signalled/inferred)
- Entextualisation of semantic dissimilarity
 - Temporal contextual coordinates
 - Local contextual coordinates
 - Intensifying degree of dissimilarity
 - Accounting for dissimilarity

4. Conclusion

Learning in discourse in context

- Generalized patterns (context is repeatable)
- Particularization (intended change / restructuring in ‘common ground’)

“From what percept does he [an organism] know that Context A is different from Context B?” (Bateson 1972:289)

-> ‘context’ must be repeatable (-> type)

-> ‘context markers’

4. Conclusion

Top-down

“ ... genres are types. But they are types in a rather peculiar way. Genres do not specify the lexicogrammatical resources of word, phrase, clause, and so on. Instead, they specify the *typical* [original emphasis] ways in which these are combined and deployed ...” (Thibault 2003: 44)

Contrastive Discourse Relations

- Do not accommodate incoming contribution in an et cetera manner, but expect some change / restructuring – locally and possibly also beyond that

9. Selected references

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Thank you!