

French Connectives

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French connectives have been the object of detailed linguistic descriptions since the 1970s. Several of these early works have paved the way for the development of classical concepts in discourse and pragmatics, such as the distinction between objective and subjective discourse relations and the notion of procedural meaning.

First, the pioneering description of the three French causal connectives *car*, *parce que*, and *puisque* by the Groupe Lambda-L (1975) was one of the first to distinguish between uses of connectives like *car* to relate claims and arguments, as in (1), from uses such as that of *parce que* to link causes and consequences that unfold in the world, as in (2):

- (1) Anne doit être fatiguée, *car* elle a quitté la réunion en avance.
'Anne must be tired, CONNECTIVE she left the meeting early.'
- (2) Éva est venue à la réunion *parce qu'*elle voulait rencontrer Max.
'Eva came to the meeting CONNECTIVE she wanted to meet Max.'

The difference between these uses is that in (2) the reason why Mary came to the meeting is that she wanted to meet Max, in other words (2) offers a reason, while in (1) it is not the case that Anne left the meeting because she was tired; the speaker draws the inference that she must be tired (from the fact that she left the meeting early). In that sense, the relation in (2) is objective because it relates real-world events and the relation in (1) is subjective because it relates the speaker's own reasoning and conclusions.

In the Groupe Lambda-L's (1975) paper, this distinction is substantiated by the existence of syntactic differences between these two uses of causal connectives. For example, the relation in (1) cannot be syntactically transformed into a question, as in (3), or into a cleft, as in (4):

- (3) *Pourquoi Anne est-elle fatiguée? *Car* elle a quitté la réunion en avance.
'Why is Anne tired? CONNECTIVE she has left the meeting early.'
- (4) *C'est *car* Anne est fatiguée *qu'*elle a quitté la réunion en avance.
'It's CONNECTIVE Anne is tired that she has left the meeting early.'

In the case of (2), on the other hand, these transformations are possible and do not produce an ungrammatical result, as illustrated in (5) and (6).

- (5) Pourquoi Éva est-elle venue à la réunion? *Parce qu'*elle voulait rencontrer Max.
'Why did Eva come to the meeting? CONNECTIVE she wanted to meet Max.'
- (6) C'est *parce qu'*elle voulait rencontrer Max *qu'*Éva est venue à la réunion.
'It's CONNECTIVE Eva wanted to meet Max that she came to the meeting.'

The Groupe Lambda-L concluded that these syntactic differences reflected semantic differences between the two relations, namely the fact that in (1) *car* is a "speech act marker" (*marqueur d'acte de parole*) in that it realizes a speech act of inference, while in (2) *parce que* is used as an "operator" (*opérateur*) in that it construes a new causal proposition on the basis

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of two propositions, entirely within the content domain (Groupe Lambda-L, 1975, p. 257). The distinction between these two uses of connectives has remained crucial in most discourse models ever since (Mann & Thompson, 1988; Kehler, 2001; Sweetser, 1990) and has been shown to apply to many languages (see Sanders & Stukker, 2012 for a cross-linguistic review). It is, in addition, integrated into most current models of discourse annotation: as pragmatic relations in the Penn Discourse Treebank (PDTB Research Group, 2007), as star relations in segmented discourse relation theory (SDRT: Asher & Lascarides, 2003; see Péry-Woodley, Afantenos, Ho-Dac, & Asher, 2011 for its application to corpus annotation), as presentational relations in rhetorical structure theory (RST: Mann & Thompson, 1988; see Carlson, Marcu, & Okurowski, 2002 for its application in the RST Discourse Treebank).

Another groundbreaking description of French connectives was the analysis of the connective *mais* (Ducrot et al., 1980), the closest French equivalent of the English connective *but*. The key idea in this analysis was that the connective *mais* provides instructions about inferred conclusions rather than relating propositional content. More specifically, in (7), the connective *mais* gives instructions to overlook the conclusion inferred on the basis of the first segment and to replace it with a conclusion drawn on the basis of the second segment:

- (7) Jean est intelligent mais il est très prétentieux.
'Jean is intelligent CONNECTIVE he is vain.'

In (7), the hearer concludes on the basis of the first segment (*Jean est intelligent*) that the speaker thinks highly of Jean. The connective *mais* instructs him to discard this inference and replace it by the one triggered by the second segment (*il est très prétentieux*), namely that Jean is not a nice person.

The idea that connectives do not encode conceptual information but rather serve to provide instructions on how to interpret discourse segments is at the heart of the notion of procedural meaning, a term describing the type of information encoded in connectives in lexical pragmatics (Blakemore, 1987).

From a crosslinguistic perspective, it has been observed that typologically related languages often display a set of closely related discourse connectives. In spite of these commonalities, connectives often differ across languages, and in many cases no one-to-one mapping can be established. For example, Anscombe and Ducrot (1977) analyzed relations that can be conveyed with the French connective *mais* and compared them with the relations that are conveyed in languages in which two distinct connectives are used to express contrast (8) and correction (9), for example with the relations between *aber* and *sondern* in German, or *pero* and *sino* in Spanish.

- (8) John does not speak Italian but he knows Italy quite well.
(9) John does not speak Italian but Spanish.

They concluded that *mais* covers both types of relations in French. Thus, even though this distinction is not lexicalized in two different connectives in French, it is still observable from the fact that the two uses of the connective *mais* are associated with different syntactic patterns.

Another well-known example of crosslinguistic differences in linguistic encoding concerns the causal domain. In French, three connectives are predominantly used to express causal relations, namely *parce que*, *car*, and *puisque* (Groupe Lambda-L, 1975; Degand & Pandder Maat, 2003; Zufferey, 2012). The difference between *parce que* and *car* is related to the distinction between objective and subjective relations discussed above. However, in current spoken French, *car* is seldom used and *parce que* is used to convey both types of causal relations (see Simon & Degand, 2007 and Degand & Fagard, 2012 for a diachronic perspective).

In this respect, French differs from other Indo-European languages such as German and Dutch, in which the objective and subjective causal connectives are equally used across the spoken and written modes (Pit, 2007). French also differs from English, a language in which the subjective causal connective *for* has almost disappeared, even from formal written registers (Zufferey & Cartoni, 2012)—unlike *car*, which has remained as frequent as *parce que* in the written mode (Simon & Degand, 2007).

While the distinction between objective and subjective relations separates uses of *parce que* and *car* in writing, this distinction cannot differentiate *car* and *puisque*, as both are subjective causal connectives (Groupe Lambda-L, 1975). Yet, in spite of this common semantic feature, *car* and *puisque* can almost never be used interchangeably (Zufferey, 2012). The specificity of *puisque* by comparison to other French causal connectives is related to information structure. While the connectives *parce que* and *car* both introduce a cause that is unknown to the hearer, *puisque* introduces a cause presented as being part of the common ground between speaker and hearer (Zufferey, 2014). In other words, *puisque* is an accessibility marker, which indicates given information. In addition to differentiating *puisque* from other French causal connectives, this specificity sets *puisque* apart from other causal connectives in closely related languages. For example, Degand (2004) reported that *puisque* and the Dutch causal connective *aangezien* do not form a translation pair. Similarly, Zufferey and Cartoni (2012) found that *puisque* is more strongly associated with the communication of common ground information than is the English connective *since*. In their contrastive study, *since* was equally used to convey given and new information, unlike *puisque*, which was associated with given information. In parallel directional corpora, *since* was predominantly translated by *puisque* when it conveyed given information and by *car* when it conveyed new information. These crosslinguistic studies therefore validated the semantic features of French connectives that were defined on the basis of monolingual data.

Finally, some French connectives encode relations that are not lexicalized by a connective in closely related languages. One example is the French connective *en effet*, which either encodes a subjective causal relation of explanation (10) or a confirmation relation (11):

- (10) Pete est un bon skieur. En effet, il a gagné trois compétitions l'an dernier.
'Pete is a good skier. CONNECTIVE he won three races last year.'
- (11) Mark pense que Pete est un bon skieur. Il est en effet excellent.
'Mark thinks that Pete is a good skier. He is CONNECTIVE excellent.'

In English and in German, the most frequent translation of *en effet* when it conveys a relation of explanation is juxtaposition (Zufferey, in press); in other words, a sequence of clauses or sentences not related by a connective. Thus the mapping of connectives across languages reveals that even closely related languages differ in the explicit or implicit marking of discourse structure.

Another semantic domain that has attracted the attention of research on French connectives is the temporal domain, albeit less in a crosslinguistic perspective. The contributions in Moline, Stosic, and Vetters (2006) are a good illustration of typical topics under investigation in this area, where the focus is on the diachronic rise of temporal connectives, the interaction with the discourse structure, and the boundaries between temporal and nontemporal uses. Temporal connectives are indeed very often ambiguous between the temporal and other semantic domains, for example of condition (12), of causality (13), or of goal (14). Examples are based on the LEXCONN resource.

- (12) Tu peux aller jouer, tant que tu ne dépasses pas le bout du chemin.
'You can play, CONNECTIVE you don't pass the end of the road.'

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- (13) Maintenant que nous sommes seuls, tu vas m'expliquer ce miracle.
'CONNECTIVE we are alone, you are going to explain this miracle to me.'
- (14) Dans une poêle, les faire revenir dans le beurre jusqu'à ce qu'elles soient cuites et d'une jolie couleur.
'In a pan, let them fry in some butter CONNECTIVE they are cooked and have a nice color.'

An exhaustive list of French connectives can be found in LEXCONN (Roze, Danlos, & Muller, 2012; Danlos, Colinet, & Steinlin, 2015), a freely available online resource listing connectives with an indication of their grammatical category, function(s), and semantic relation(s). The semantic relations conveyed by each connective are in addition illustrated with examples, and in some cases with reference to previous work.

According to LEXCONN, there are 328 connectives in French, among which 73 are ambiguous between two discourse relations. For example, the connective *si* can express either a condition or a contrastive relation, as illustrated in (15) and (16) respectively.

- (15) Pierre sera content si Marie gagne la course.
'Pierre will be happy CONNECTIVE Marie wins the race.'
- (16) Si Pierre est content de son score, Marie elle est très déçue du résultat.
'CONNECTIVE Pierre is satisfied with his score, Marie is very disappointed by the result.'

In addition, 14 French connectives are ambiguous between a connective and a non-connective meaning, as illustrated by *et* (the French equivalent of *and*) in (17) and (18):

- (17) Pierre est musicien et Jeanne est peintre.
'Pierre is a musician CONNECTIVE Jeanne is a painter.'
- (18) Pierre et Jeanne sont tous les deux musiciens.
'Pierre CONNECTIVE Jeanne are both musicians.'

In (18), *et* is not considered as a connective, because in most models of discourse structure connectives minimally link two distinct clauses.

The aim of LEXCONN was to classify all connectives using the set of relations provided by SDRT. However, this taxonomy proved to be insufficient to annotate all the relations conveyed by French connectives. In some cases, labels were therefore taken from the list provided by RST, as for example "digression" and "detachment." In a number of cases, however, connectives conveyed relations that could not be characterized by any label in any of the current discourse frameworks. Yet these cases still fulfilled all the tests for the identification of discourse relations, such as non-compositionality and lack of conceptual meaning. One example is the connective *à mesure que* in (19):

- (19) Les enfants s'impacientaient à mesure que le cours avançait.
'Children were getting impatient CONNECTIVE the lesson was progressing.'

One solution in accounting for the meaning of this connective is to combine a label of temporal progression with a causal label. More generally, such cases illustrate the richness of the type of meaning that can be conveyed by connectives and the necessity to compare the relations conveyed by connectives across many different languages in order to deepen our understanding of the types of relations linking discourse segments.

SEE ALSO: Connectives; Corpora: French-Language; Grammar and Discourse; Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis; Pragmatics Versus Semantics

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Suggested Readings

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