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## 1. Introduction

This paper is about conversation and relevance theory. It aims to provide neither a new account nor a new theory of conversation within relevance theory; this would be over-ambitious and contradictory to the general philosophy of relevance theory. My purpose is simply to give empirical arguments for a relevance-based approach to conversation, and more precisely to two problems raised by conversations. First, the *sequencing problem*, which consists in explaining the connections between utterance units in conversation, and more specifically the connections marked by discourse or pragmatic connectives. Second, the *interpretive problem*, which consists in explaining the relation between an utterance-type and its interpretation. In works on conversation, there is a great temptation to account for these two problems by means of specific conversational principles. I will show that this is not necessary, and that relevance theory provides a general framework quite able to account for these two problems.

The whole argument will be contrastive. I will begin the discussion of pragmatic connectives using Ducrot's traditional pragmatic description in a framework which makes the sequencing problem a central issue (his argumentation theory). More precisely, Ducrot's approach to conversation is crucially dependent on the ability of any pragmatic marker to connect a semantic content within a discourse segment with the use of the utterance (its 'énonciation'), that is, the speech act realised and the act of utterance itself ('acte d'énonciation'). In this framework, the claim that connectives allude to

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discourse leads to a theory of language use which is oriented to discourse properties. The sequencing problem as well as the interpretive problem then receive discourse-oriented solutions.

In contrast, the solution which I will present is based on the same empirical domain (discourse connections), but imposes different interpretations on the data. In particular, the connections marked by connectives receive a different explanation if we adopt an inferential approach. This approach is not discourse-oriented but inferential: what is at issue is simply what has been communicated by the utterance. The point of this paper is to compare the predictions of the two approaches with actual conversational uses of connectives. At first sight, it might be assumed that the discourse-oriented approach would be better suited to account for conversational data. In fact, the predictions of the discourse approach are not precise enough to solve either the sequential problem or the interpretive problem. By contrast, the inferential approach gives appropriate results, because it makes the sequencing problem an interpretive one and because it is compatible with the notion of conversational scenario which governs the use of connectives in conversation.

Before introducing the problem of connectives, I will discuss briefly the relation between pragmatic theory and conversation, and the relevance of conversation for pragmatic theories.

## 2. Conversation and pragmatics

Even though pragmatic theories are often based on conversational examples, it is too strong to claim that pragmatic theories are theories of conversation.[1] For instance, Grice's theory (cf. Grice 1975) makes specific claims about conversation (cf. the cooperative principle and the maxims of conversation), but does not provide a theory of conversation. Conversation appears there as an idealised type of rational communication. The cooperative principle is concerned with communicative behaviours which participants in a conversation should respect, but it would be a mistake to assume that the conversational maxims are specific to conversation: Grice's theory is, rather, a theory of utterance interpretation. The interest of conversation, as far as the

[1] There is an exception to this general state of affairs, provided by Levinson (1983). Levinson devotes a whole chapter of his introduction to pragmatics to conversation. But it appears that the domain of reference is not formal philosophy or formal linguistics (which traditionally deal with topics like presupposition, implicature, speech acts, deixis), but sociolinguistics and micro-sociology, that is, theories of interaction, ethnomethodology, linguistic variation, etc.

sequencing problem is concerned, lies in how the maxims of conversation are used in order to make the connection understandable or, in terms of the interpretive problem, in how the hearer has to exploit the maxims in order to make the intended inference.

Another pragmatic theory is relevance theory (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986). Relevance theory, as I understand it, says nothing specific about conversation, that is, about its structure, its progression, the rules participants should obey when interacting, etc., although almost all examples given are small exchanges or dialogues. What relevance theory predicts about conversation is that, as one communicative device among others, it should not behave differently in terms of relevance. One of the important predictions that relevance theory makes about conversation is that no specific sequencing or interpretive principles should be necessary to explain conversational data. We can go a little further and say that, if human cognition is relevance oriented, the conversational behaviour of participants should not escape the general relevance orientation of cognition: utterances in conversation should be relevance oriented. This prediction is at first sight counterintuitive, and does not accord with the tradition of conversation analysis. But we will see that a strict analysis of conversational data makes it totally plausible and, furthermore, shows that relevance theory attains a higher degree of descriptive and explanatory adequacy than a discourse-based approach.

If pragmatic theories make indirect reference to conversation, can we say that conversation is relevant for pragmatic theory in general, and for relevance theory in particular? This is the question I turn to now.

## 3. The relevance of conversation

The first point I would like to argue for is that *conversation is not in itself an object of study*. Rather, works on conversation focus on different types of uses of conversational data.

*(i)* One tradition, which belongs to the sociological paradigm, uses conversational data as arguments for general cognitive and rational behaviours of social agents engaged in specific tasks (for instance, the decision-making of a jury in court). This tradition, conventionally designated as *ethnomethodology*, is typical of what Levinson (1983) has called *conversation analysis*. In this paradigm, conversation is not an object in itself, but is used indirectly to learn about human cognitive, social, and contextually dependent behaviours. The methodology of the ethnosciences is classical, involving empirical and inductive reasoning.

*(ii)* A second tradition which has been concerned with conversation is termed *discourse analysis* by Levinson. This paradigm comes directly from linguistic methodology: the procedure is mainly deductive, model-theoretic, and independent of any social or cognitive factors affecting participants' behaviour. The main purpose of discourse analysis is to elaborate a rule-governed model of conversation, proposing compositional rules or principles to explain the construction of compound discourse units from atomic units and functional principles to explain the pragmatic interpretation of discourse units. For instance compositional principles will explain the relations between conversational units (exchanges, moves and acts) and interpretive principles will account for the allocation of illocutionary force to moves and acts.[2] Here again, conversation is not an object in itself: conversational data are used mainly for descriptive and explanatory reasons. In this paradigm, we can abstract two types of tasks: explaining first the relation between discourse-units realised within utterances and the functions they perform (that is, their illocutionary function); and second the relation between different discourse units producing coherent discourse sequences. The first task implies the formulation of *interpretive rules* in conversation (what I called the *interpretive problem*), the second the formulation of *sequencing rules* (which belong to the *sequencing problem*).

The first task (interpretive) is not itself autonomous: it is the conventional task of pragmatic theory, that is to give non ad hoc, rule-governed principles of interpretation. Thus, it is not surprising that discourse analysis has adopted *speech act theory* as a basis for pragmatic interpretation, because this framework has the purpose of providing a general principle-governed theory of utterance interpretation in context. In other words, if speech act theory is correct, it provides a means of systematically assigning pragmatic interpretations to conversational units, that is, illocutionary forces to moves and acts. But within the domain of conversation analysis, criticisms have been made of speech act theory (cf. Levinson 1983). The main criticism has been of the assumption that there is a one-to-one relation between an utterance unit and an act unit related by the principles of speech act theory. It has been argued that in conversation, a single utterance unit can accomplish more than one speech act, which represents an impossible situation within speech act theory.[3]

[2] Cf. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) for a general model of discourse structure and Moeschler (1989a) for a more formal approach to the syntax and semantics of dialogue.

[3] The argument is given by Levinson (1983: 290). In fact, what is problematic within speech act theory is not that a primary illocutionary act may indirectly perform a secondary illocutionary

The problem is quite different with sequencing rules; no pragmatic theory has been concerned with discourse phenomena, nor has even predicted what the principles governing discourse sequencings could be. In the discourse analysis paradigm, the problem is even worse, because sequencing rules have as objects not utterances, but the actions realised by utterances (cf. Labov 1972). Labov proposes to represent the organisation of discourse as the result of three types of rules: rules of production, which relate an action to an utterance, rules of interpretation, relating conversely the utterance to the action it realises, and finally sequencing rules, which relate the actions realised by utterances. To make any hypothesis about the nature of sequencing rules, it is not sufficient to refer to a theory of speech acts, which deals principally with the typology of speech acts, the satisfaction conditions of speech acts and the relation between the forms of the utterance and the speech acts realised (cf. Searle 1979). It is in fact necessary to know more, precisely about the sequences of speech acts. This means that sequencing rules are not dependent on linguistic facts, but belong to the more general domain of the *theory of action*.[4]

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act, as in indirect speech acts. What is problematic is that one utterance can convey both secondary and primary illocutions, as B's answer shows:

A: Would you like another drink?

B: Yes I would, thank you, but make it a small one.

Another problem raised by Levinson is due to perlocutionary acts that can convey an illocution. Here again, there is no one-to-one relation between utterance and speech act. The last argument by Levinson (1983: 312) is based on Schegloff's analysis of opening sections in telephone conversations (cf. Schegloff 1979). In the following typical opening, there are a lot of functions or illocutions associated to single utterances:

C: (causes telephone to ring at R's location) (SUMMONS)
R: hello (ANSWER) + (DISPLAY FOR RECOGNITION)
C: hi (GREETING 1ST PART)
(CLAIM THAT C HAS RECOGNIZED R)
(CLAIM THAT R CAN RECOGNIZE C)
R: oh hi (GREETING 2ND PART)
(CLAIM THAT R HAS RECOGNIZED C)

[4] This argument must be amended according to a proposal, which has not been developed, by Searle and Vanderveken (1985: 11):

> 'But we will not get an adequate account of linguistic competence or speech acts until we can describe the speaker's ability to produce and understand utterances (i.e. to produce and understand illocutionary acts) in *ordered speech-act sequences* that constitute arguments, discussions, buying and selling, exchanging letters, making jokes, etc. For terminological convenience we will call these ordered sequences simply *conversations*. The key to understanding the structure of conversations is to see that each illocutionary act creates the possibility of a finite and usually quite limited set of appropriate illocutionary acts as replies'.

This short description of conversation analysis leads to the conclusion that the *relevance of conversation for pragmatic theories* cannot be determined a priori. In fact, we could argue that the sequencing problem, which is specific to discourse, is neither a linguistic nor a pragmatic problem, but depends on a theory of action; on the other hand, the interpretive problem is not specific to conversation, and is better described in a framework which is independent of conversational data. In this respect, conversation is not really relevant for pragmatics in general, and a fortiori for relevance theory. Nevertheless, if you made the presumption that my paper is optimally relevant, you might have inferred that I will argue that conversation has at least some degree of relevance for both pragmatic theory and relevance theory. This is exactly what I will argue. But I will assume that the general argument I have given so far is correct. So *the relevance of conversation does not follow from discourse theory, but from some conversational data which provide counterexamples to certain theories of discourse.* The examples I will give are mainly concerned with *discourse connectives*, and more specifically with *interpretive uses* of connectives which contradict the predictions of discourse analysis. The paradox we will meet is that conversation is relevant for relevance theory, but not for conversational or coherence theories.

## 4. Discourse connectives: A coherence approach

Discourse connectives, known in the French tradition as pragmatic connectives, have typically been studied within discourse theories.[5] What I will present here is an account of pragmatic connectives which assumes a central function for discourse routines or argumentation principles, that is, Ducrot's *theory of argumentation* (cf. Ducrot 1980, Ducrot et al. 1980 and Groupe λ-l 1975). The central discussion will be about the discourse behaviour of *because* (*parce que*) in French.

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Such a research project on conversation is consistent with speech act theory, and has been developed in my earlier work on conversation (cf. Moeschler 1985). The problem is that predictions cannot be made about types of speech acts as replies, but only about the degree of appropriateness of the replies.

[5] The first work on discourse connectives within relevance theory was that of Diane Blakemore (1987). For other descriptions of and proposals about the function of pragmatic connectives in the framework of relevance theory, cf. Moeschler (1989a, b), Luscher (1989), Luscher and Moeschler (1990) and Luscher (forthcoming).

The main semantic and pragmatic property of *parce que* (PQ) is that it gives rise to ambiguous utterances, which is not the case for its near synonyms *car* (*for*) and *puisque* (*since*) (cf. Groupe λ-l 1975). This behaviour can be seen in the following examples:

(1) Marie est heureuse parce que Jean l'aime.
'Mary is happy because John loves her.'

The ambiguity is between reading (2) and reading (3):

(2) John's love for Mary is the cause of her happiness.
(3) The assertion by the speaker that Mary is happy is supported by the (presupposed) fact that John loves Mary.

This difference is greater with interrogative and negative sentences:

(4a) Est-ce que Marie est heureuse parce que Jean l'aime?
'Is Mary happy because John loves her?'
(4b) Est-ce que Marie est heureuse? Parce que Jean l'aime.
'Is Mary happy? Because John loves her.'
(5a) Marie n'est pas heureuse parce que Jean l'aime (mais parce que Bill l'aime).
'Mary is not happy because John loves her (but because Bill loves her).'
(5b) Marie n'est pas heureuse, parce que Jean l'aime.
'Mary is not happy, because John loves her.'

I hope that these differences are the same in English as in French. In any case, what these sentences mean in French is the following:

*(i)* in the case of interrogatives, (4a) questions the possible causal relation between John's love and Mary's happiness, while (4b) gives a reason (John's love for Mary) for the relevance of the question;

*(ii)* in the case of negatives, (5a) denies a causal relation between John's love and Mary's happiness (it is possible to make a correction), while in (5b) it is asserted that Mary is not happy, and John's love is given as an argument supporting this claim.

These differences lead Ducrot to the conclusion that French *parce que* has two discourse functions: the first, which he calls a *semantic operator*, is to connect two propositional contents within a single speech act unit (assertion, question, negation); the second, which he calls a *pragmatic connective*, is to connect two speech acts, for instance an assertion, a question or a denial and an explanation. This approach makes the following predictions regarding the relations between semantic information and types of reading: the closer the semantic relationship between the two propositional contents, the less likely is the pragmatic reading (the preferred reading is the semantic operator reading); conversely, the more remote the semantic relationship between the propositional contents, the more likely is the pragmatic reading (the preferred reading is the pragmatic connective reading). The marked case is illustrated by the so called *'énonciative' reading*, as in (6) with reading (7):

(6) Il y a du poulet dans le frigo, parce que je n'ai pas envie de faire à manger.
'There is some chicken in the refrigerator, because I don't want to cook dinner.

(7) There is some chicken in the refrigerator, and I say that there is some chicken in the refrigerator because I don't want to cook dinner.

This type of analysis[6] is very convenient, because it is not necessary to explain the propositional relationship between semantic contents: the connective gives a general *instruction* to connect two units, these units being either propositional contents (Q, P), or a propositional content (Q) and an illocutionary force (F(P)), or a propositional content (Q) and an act of 'énonciation' (E(P)), as shown in (8):

(8a) CAUSE (Q, P)

[6] The distinction between the 'énonciative' reading and the performative one may appear tricky for a non-continental reader. In fact, the distinction between an act of utterance and an illocutionary act is crucial in Ducrot's theory. Recall that in his 'énonciation' theory, the sense of an utterance (which is distinct from the meaning of a sentence) is not its reference or the illocution it conveys, but consists of an image of its 'énonciation', that is, the event which originates it. For Ducrot, one way of explaining one's utterance is just to refer to the event of the 'énonciation'; in this case, the motivation for an utterance being used is the act which originates its production. This is what is called the act of 'énonciation'. A good example of such self-reference is given in French with the uses of the connective *puisque* ('since'). In the utterance *Je pars, puisque nous nous sommes promis de tout nous dire* ('I am leaving, since we decided to tell each other everything'), the connective has in its scope not the fact that the speaker is leaving, but the very act of telling the hearer that he is leaving. The connective *puisque* in French cannot have the illocution in its scope. We cannot say for instance: **Est-ce que tu pars, puisque nous nous somme promis de tout nous dire?* ('Are you leaving, since we promised to tell each other everything?). Cf. Moeschler (forthcoming) for an explanation of these impossibilities.

(8b) CAUSE (Q, F(P))
(8c) CAUSE (Q, E(P))

Unfortunately, there is a serious objection to this analysis. Consider example (9), which assumes a non-canonical relation between propositional contents:

(9) Jacquès est tombé à mobylette, parce qu'il a le bras dans le plâtre.
'James has fallen off his motor-bike, because his arm is in plaster.'

The relevant reading, that is, the intended reading, is given by (10), which contrasts with the standard reading (11), which is also possible:

(10) James's fall is the cause of his broken arm.
(11) James's broken arm is the cause of his fall.

What is relevant here is the difference between reading (10) and the so-called 'énonciative' reading of (9), given in (12):

(12) James has fallen off his motor-bike and I say that James has fallen off his motor-bike because his arm is in plaster.

(12) has the semantic structure (8c), that is CAUSE (Q, E(P)). If this relation explains the first conjunct, that is, the act of uttering P, or E(P), the second conjunct (the cause of P, that is Q) is not motivated: the speaker only states its causal relevance. Moreover, if Q is not the cause of a particular P, but the cause of the act of uttering P, one should predict that any proposition Q could fit. Let us try, with Q = 'Mary is my wife':

(13) Jacques est tombé à mobylette, parce que Marie est ma femme.
'James has fallen off his motor-bike, because Mary is my wife.'

Here, the 'énonciative' reading given in (14) is very strange, and the only possible reading is the classical reading (8a) given in (15):

(14) James has fallen off his motor-bike, and I say that James has fallen off his motor-bike because Mary is my wife.
(15) 'Mary is my wife' is the cause of James' fall.

The reason, I would suggest, is this. The so-called 'énonciative' reading of *P, because Q* is only possible where it would be reasonable to assert *Q because P* on a classical reading. In other words, I can assert that *I say P because of the fact that Q* only if I believe that P is the cause of Q. The question is how this constraint on the propositional content of the 'énonciative' reading can be explained.[7]

Example (9), which de Fornel (1989) calls the *invited inference* use of *parce que*, is neither a strange exception to the function of *parce que* in French nor a pragmatic aberration. Sperber and Wilson (1986: 82) have observed that 'when available assumptions correspond to a certain schema, related schemas are used to derive further assumptions'. The example they give is the relation between (16) and the derived assumption (17):

(16) If P then Q
(17) If (not P) then (not Q)

Geiss and Zwicky (1971) introduce the notion of *invited inference* to account for this. The invited inference carried by (16) is the converse of its logical equivalent (18):

(18) If (not Q), then (not P)

This schema, which encourages the interpretation of a conditional relation as a bi-conditional, can be found in two other types of data: speech acts and negation.

*(i) Speech acts*: Fauconnier (1981: 50) has observed that such an inversion occurs in the relation between speech acts and felicity conditions. He states that

> 'strictly, if the speech act is accomplished sincerely and successfully, the felicity condition is satisfied (...); the speech act implies the felicity condition. If this implication is reversed (...), the satisfaction of the felicity condition will imply that the speech act will happen.' (my translation)

[7] The proposed suggestion is due to Deirdre Wilson (personal communication). I tried to give, in Moeschler (1989a), a parallel explanation for the 'enunciative' reading appealing to a principle of conservation of the information stored under the encyclopaedic entries of the concepts contained in the logical form of the utterance.

This means that if the speech act (19) implies the felicity condition (20), the expression of the felicity condition implies the realisation of the speech act.

(19) I propose to help you.
(20) I have time to help you.

*(ii) Negation:* My thesis (cf. Moeschler 1991) is that a negative utterance of logical form (not P) gives rise, via a positive contextual assumption, to a contextual implication (not Q), in the following quasi-deductive schema:[8]

(21a) if P, then Q (contextual assumption)
(21b) not P (logical form of the utterance)
(21c) not Q (contextual implication)

For instance, the answer to the question in (22) will give rise to the contextual implication (23), via the accessible contextual assumption (24):

(22) A: How is the weather?
B: The weather isn't nice.
(23) A and B will not go to the beach.
(24) If the weather is fine, A and B will go to the beach.

We find again the logical inversion typical of invited inference.

If we go back to the invited inference use of *parce que*, we get the following general schema:

(25) P parce que Q $\rightarrow$ Q because P

which is synonymous with (26):

(26) P CAUSE Q.

The invited inference use of *parce que* thus provides an argument against the argumentative or 'énonciative' analysis, and shows that the connective

[8] I call this schema a quasi-deductive schema following Deirdre Wilson's suggestion: If this schema is triggered by the fact that someone has said *not-P*, the conclusion which is inferred is not drawn from its propositional content alone. Contextual information (a contextual assumption) is necessary. Moreover, the schema is not deductive in the classical sense: no standard deductive device would accept it.

*parce que* is more sensitive to propositional constraints than the 'énonciative' approach predicts.

I have suggested that Ducrot's approach is coherence-oriented. I would now like to develop this point. In fact, if his description of *parce que* predicts the direction of the relation as a constant, and the value of the units connected as variables, it means that the pragmatic function attached to *parce que* is limited to the following *instruction*: Q is given as an argument explaining the proposition P, or the illocutionary act performed by P, or the utterance ('énonciation') of P. But this instruction cannot be an *interpretive rule* for *parce que*: it is only a *sequencing rule*, because what is specified is not the interpretation of the connection, but the condition for using *parce que*. This is a dramatic paradox, because we are faced with a theory which provides only discourse constraints (as sequencing rules), and which is unable to restrict in any way the domain of possible connections. In other words, coherence is presupposed (the presence of a connective is a sufficient condition for coherence), but not explained. This state of affairs is quite straightforward for a coherence theorist: coherence is not predictable; all that can be predicted are certain types of discourse relations established by conventional means, that is, by discourse connectives.

I believe that this analysis is mistaken, not because coherence is predictable, but because the pragmatic function of discourse connectives is not sequential, but interpretive. In other words, I claim that connectives give instructions on how to find a relevant interpretation of the utterances, or to increase the relevance of utterances when specific discourse tasks would otherwise reduce relevance. I will argue for this thesis by considering conversational uses of *parce que*. These examples do not belong to the finite set of possible uses of *parce que* given in (8), and cannot receive the predicted 'énonciative' reading. I believe that these examples are real counterexamples to Ducrot's analysis. After the analysis of these examples, I will make a more general comment on argumentation theory and relevance theory, which leads to an unexpected conclusion relative to conversation and relevance theory.

## 5. *Parce que* in conversation: Scripts and relevance

Consider the following telephone conversation (from Schmale-Buton and Schmale 1984):

(27) *Le petit avait mal au ventre*

$C_1$ allô
"hallo"

$A_1$ allô le trente soixante-dix onze
"hallo 307011?"

$C_2$ oui Madame
"yes Madame"

$A_2$ bonjour Madame (*vite*) je vous avais téléphoné tout à l'heure là pour appeler le docteur chez Madame Allégro à Mareuil
"good morning Madame I called earlier to ask the doctor to come to Mrs. A. at M."

$C_3$ oui oui
"yes yes"

$A_3$ est-ce qu'il est parti?
"has he left?"

$C_4$ oui il est parti faire ses visites Madame
"yes he's out on his rounds Madame"

$A_4$ ah bon ***parce que***$_1$ euh je voulais lui parler c'était peut-être pas la peine qu'il vienne mais enfin (*très vite*) ça fait rien ça fait rien
"ah **because**$_1$ I wanted to speak to him there's perhaps no need for him to come but you know it doesn't matter"

$C_5$ bon Madame euh je regrette mais il (bon?)
"well Madame I am sorry but he"

$A_5$ (*vite*) non mais ça ça fait rien ***parce que***$_2$ c'était le le petit avait mal au ventre et pis ça l'air d'être passé
"no but it doesn't matter **because**$_2$ it was the baby had tummy-ache and now it seems to be over"

$C_6$ oui
"yes"

$A_6$ mais enfin ça fait pas plus mal qu'il le voie hein
"but anyway it won't do any harm to examine him will it"

$C_7$ ***parce que***$_3$ euh i i s'il repasse par là je lui dirai mais je peux pas vous dire hein
"**because**$_3$ er if he comes back I'll tell him but I can't say you know"

$A_7$ (*vite*) oui ah ben ça fait rien
"yes well it doesn't matter"

$C_8$ bon
"all right"

$A_8$ (*vite*) ça fait rien excusez-moi
"it doesn't matter excuse me"

$C_9$ (d'accord?) je vous en prie Madame
"all right you're welcome Madame"

$A_9$ au revoir Madame
"good-bye Madame"

$C_{10}$ au revoir Madame
"good-bye Madame"

In this conversation, we meet three uses of *parce que*, which are highly dependent on conversational routines or general scripts.

(i) The first use (PQ1) typically occurs after what conversational analysts call a *pre-sequence*: its function is to introduce a justification of a previous question, a question which gives rise to an embedded exchange ($A_3$–$C_4$).[9]

(ii) The second *parce que* (PQ2) introduces another type of justification, which concerns the reason for the phone call.

(iii) Finally, the third use (PQ3) is typically used in French to restart the conversation (typically with the structure *because if* ...).

The question I would like to ask is the following: is it possible to account for these uses of *parce que* in a theory of coherence? My answer is no, for the following reasons:

*(i)* If *parce que* imposes sequential constraints, this should imply that the connections conveyed by *parce que* are predictable; but this is not the case. Thus, the only coherence explanation is *ex post facto*. If we adopt a general compositional model of dialogue, as described in Moeschler (1989a), it appears that the connections are ad hoc, at least for the second and third use.

[9] An embedded exchange is either a preceding or a following exchange which is subordinate to a directive constituent (act or move). For instance, the constituent structure of the first use of *parce que* can be represented as follows in the tradition of the hierarchical and functional analysis of conversation (cf. Moeschler 1985):

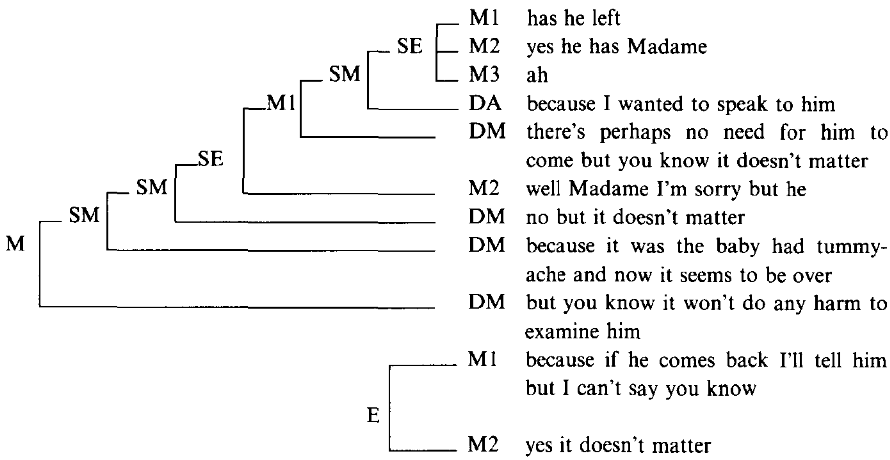
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| M | SE | M1 | has he left |
| | | M2 | yes he has Madame |
| | | M3 | ah |
| | | DA | because I wanted to speak to him |

where M stands for 'move', Mi for 'move i', DA for 'directive act', SE for 'subordinate exchange'. The exchange SE, made up of M1, M2, M3, is thus subordinate to the act (DA) introduced by *parce que*.

This model, which contains a syntax, a semantics and an interpretation procedure, produces structural descriptions which make explicit the connection, but leave open the question of how the connective is to be interpreted.[10]

*(ii)* Suppose the coherence approach does account for the coherence of these utterances, and the structural descriptions given in notes 9 and 10 are appropriate. Such analyses must still explain how *parce que* can subordinate preceding conversational constituents. For instance, for the first use of *parce que* (PQ1), we have to invoke a *discourse routine* which would specify the scope of the left constituent. But this rule (rule of *maximal climbing* in Moeschler 1989a) has no independent motivation. It is thus ad hoc. But if it is not invoked, then it is not possible to explain how a connective conventionally associated with the introduction of causes, explanations, justifications, etc. can have the conversational function required by the conversational analysis. We are faced here with a serious dilemma: either we preserve the model by using an ad hoc discourse routine, or we preserve the classical analysis of the connective. But, in the latter case, we run up against the complexity of the conversational data, and the theory is unable either to describe or to explain the conversational uses of the connective.

[10] In note 9, I gave the hierarchical representation of PQ1. If we apply the same technique of analysis to the whole sequence, we obtain the following structural description (cf. Moeschler 1989a):




As the trees show, the connection made by PQ2 is accounted for by the same principle of connection as in PQ1, but its function is not explained. The case is worse for PQ3, because PQ3 starts up a new exchange, and creates no connection with what precedes.

*(iii)* The third reason is linked to the interpretive aspect of *parce que*. A coherence-based approach makes connections not between the propositions expressed, but between the speech acts performed, and moreover between the acts of utterance ('énonciations'). For instance, PQ2 would receive the following paraphrase:

(28) *I tell you* that it doesn't matter, because *I have to tell you* that the baby had tummy-ache and now it seems to be over.

But this approach does not explain the possible 'énonciative' interpretation in all its possible combinations. If we use the following variables, P and Q for propositions, F($\phi$) for the illocutionary force attached to $\phi$, and E ($\phi$) for the act of uttering $\phi$, we obtain the following nine logical structures:

(29a) P *parce que* Q
(29b) F (P) *parce que* Q
(29c) E (P) *parce que* Q
(29d) P *parce que* F (Q)
(29e) P *parce que* E (Q)
(29f) F (P) *parce que* F (Q)
(29g) F (P) *parce que* E (Q)
(29h) E (P) *parce que* F (Q)
(29i) E (P) *parce que* E (Q)

But nothing in the description can specify the appropriate structure nor predict which structures are possible and which are not possible.

After these negative statements, I would like to propose a more general positive answer to the question of how *parce que* is interpreted in conversation. My answer will be that *parce que* is narrowly associated with general scripts for conducting conversations. These are respectively scripts for opening a conversation, for repairing failure of an opening pre-sequence, and for assigning jobs in a surgery. I propose the following more precise scripts associated with each use of *parce que*:

(30) *Script associated with parce que*$_1$
(a) If a speaker performs a pre-sequence S, then there is a set of reasons R for S (R being the cause of S, or CAUSE (R, S)).
(b) S is associated with certain anticipatory hypotheses Hs, a sub-set of which corresponds to R.

In this case, I will say that *parce que* confirms an anticipatory hypothesis H belonging to R, this hypothesis being the cause of the pre-sequence.

(31) H: The patient wants to speak to the doctor.

(32) *Script associated with parce que$_2$*
If a pre-sequence S fails, the speaker must give a reason for his act of communication.

In this script, to give a reason for the phone call is to give a reason for the closure of the preceding exchange (given by *non mais ça fait rien*).

(33) *Script associated with parce que$_3$*
(a) Normally, only a doctor can give a medical diagnosis.
(b) A medical secretary has the function of informing the doctor about the patients' calls.
(c) If the doctor is absent, the medical secretary cannot give a diagnosis.

This script gives access to the contextual assumptions (34) and (36), which are responsible for the implicatures (35) and (37) conveyed by the utterance introduced by *parce que*:

(34) *Context associated with the interpretation of parce que$_3$*
(a) If the doctor comes back, he will be informed. (cf. 33b)
(b) If the doctor is informed, he will decide what must be done. (contextual assumption)
(c) The doctor will probably come back. (contextual assumption)

From (34a and b), the hearer will draw the contextual implication (35):

(35) The doctor will decide what must be done.

The context in (34) can be extended by adding the following assumptions:

(36a) If the doctor is absent, the medical secretary cannot give a diagnosis. (cf. 33c)
(36b) The doctor is absent. (contextual assumption)

Then it is possible to draw the further contextual implication (37):

(37) The medical secretary cannot give a diagnosis.

In this use of *parce que*, we see that what is important is not a general semantic schema imposed by the connective, but the relation between information given in the conversation and general assumptions accessible to the participants in the conversation. What is specific to the connective here is its ability to connect information relevant to the interpretation process. If we eliminate it (*s'il repasse par là, je lui dirai*), what is lacking is a connection between what has been processed previously and the information given in the new utterance. I claim here that the connection is not discursive but cognitive and links propositional units, that is, thoughts with descriptive content and logical properties.

This linking cognitive aspect of *parce que* is not specific to this example. I would like to give a supplementary argument from another telephone conversation, which exhibits a very nice use of *parce que*:

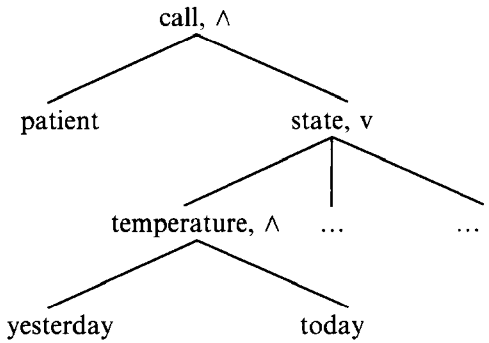
(38) je vous appelle *parce que* ma fille est soignée par le docteur R* et elle a depuis hier beaucoup de fièvre maintenant elle a plus de 40 hier soir elle avait autour de 39
'I am calling you *because* my daughter is a patient of Dr. R* and she's had a high temperature since yesterday now her temperature is over 40 degrees Celsius yesterday night it was about 39'

This move is interesting, because at first sight the discourse seems to be organised by connectives and temporal markers (*parce que*, *et*, *maintenant*, *hier soir*). But it is hard to see the function of *parce que* as introducing a justification for the call, simply because the utterance introduced by *parce que* contains the relevant information. In other words, the discursive organisation, which would associate a subordinate function to the speech act introduced by *parce que*, contradicts the informational content of the move. The general script needed to interpret the sequence of utterances is given in (39), whereas (40) is a more formal representation using the and–or tree device:

(39) *Script associated with a phone call to a surgery*
1. When a patient calls a surgery he generally gives a reason for his call. The principal reasons in this context are:
(a) belonging to the doctor's practice (generally a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the call);

(b) indication of the state of the patient (high temperature, pain, etc.).
2. When the principal reason (b) has been given (for instance high temperature), further details can be given depending on the communicative intention of the speaker (for instance, if the previous information was vague, it can be further specified by giving quantitative, qualitative, temporal, spatial references).

(40) *Logical structure of a phone call to a surgery*




These examples show that the function of discourse connectives is interpretive, and cannot be explained within a theory of discourse. But is it enough to state that these facts can be explained within a cognitive framework like relevance theory? To do so, it would be necessary to show how relevance affects these uses. In this paper, I will not give descriptive or theoretical arguments for a general account of pragmatic connectives within relevance theory (for such arguments see Blakemore 1987 and Moeschler 1989a).[11] What I would like to do is to pursue the analysis of the above examples in relation to conversation and relevance theory. Later I will give an indirect argument concerning the relationship between argumentation and conversation on the one hand and relevance and conversation on the other.

If we accept the hypothesis that discourse connectives have no specific discourse function, how do they behave with respect to relevance? One possible answer is that *parce que* in conversation introduces an utterance

[11] In Blakemore's description, discourse connectives are examples of 'semantic constraints on relevance', which illustrate a non-truth-conditional aspect of the semantics of natural language. In Moeschler's analyses, connectives are means of optimising relevance, and are associated with pragmatic procedures. They are thus constructions which encode non-conceptual aspects of meaning (cf. Wilson and Sperber 1990).

which increases the relevance of a previous action or utterance. For instance, the first use of *parce que* in conversation (27) aims to increase the relevance of an action (to open a pre-sequence) which has failed. In example (38), giving the reason for a phone call to a surgery makes the call itself more relevant. In others words, I propose that, even if the possibility of finding relevant interpretations of the utterances in conversation is not in question here, *certain conversational routines need to be monitored by specific discourse devices, in order to guide the interpretation process in the most efficient way.* Connectives in conversation have precisely this function.

## 6. Back to argumentation and relevance

Now I would like to return to argumentation theory and relevance theory with regard to conversation in general. So far I have argued for a non-discourse-oriented approach to discourse connectives. But this result is paradoxical, because at first sight it would be logical to conclude that the best approach to discourse connectives would be a discourse theory, for example the theory of argumentation. In fact, the result is not surprising, if we look at the possible ways of describing conversation within argumentation theory and within relevance theory. I think that it is possible to state the following propositions about the relation between argumentation theory and conversation on the one hand, and relevance theory and conversation on the other:

(41) *Argumentation and conversation*:
- (P1) Conversation, as a type-unit, is a well defined object; as such, it obeys principles of argumentative closure.
- (P2) Conversation, as a token-unit, cannot be apprehended directly: the principles of coherence which organise it are about abstract units, that is type-units.
- (P3) The uses of argumentative markers (like connectives) must be interpreted as 'enunciatively' marked, when they do not correspond to predictions from their unmarked uses.

What these propositions state is that the only way to explain any discourse fact occurring within a conversation is to transform the token-unit conversation into a type-unit, which has a set of clear-cut properties: structural properties of closure principles (for any compound units); sequencing properties attached to the unit-types which make up the type-unit conversation;

sequencing constraints attached to discourse connectives. As we see, the properties are defined a priori. If the conversational data contradict these properties, this is not an argument against the theory itself, but an argument against the possibility of saying anything about 'performance'. This argument is typical of what Ducrot has called a theory of 'structuralism of idealised discourse'.

(42) *Relevance and conversation:*
(P'1) Conversation is a type of communication; as such, interpretive mechanisms in conversation are not specific to this type of communicative device.
(P'2) Conversation, as an empirical object, is not pragmatically opaque; access to interpretation is a matter of accessibility of relevant contexts.
(P'3) The uses of connectives in conversation are neither sequentially odd nor interpretively problematic: they simply work on representational objects (thoughts or propositional forms) and not on discourse units.

The first proposition claims that a priori there is nothing specific to conversation regarding relevance and communication. This is obvious from the point of view of relevance theory, but is not accepted by conversation analysts. According to the latter, conversation exhibits structural and communicative properties which are specific to this type of comunication device (see for instance the conversational definition of relevance given by conversationalists under the label of *conditional relevance* – cf. Levinson 1983 for a general introduction). The second proposition is in fact a consequence of the general interpretive device proposed by relevance theory where applied to conversation. What seems odd in conversations we analyse is not incoherence as a sequential problem, but incoherence as a cognitive or interpretive problem. It is seldom the case that we do not understand a conversation in which we participate (if this is the case, the problem concerns accessibility of contexts); but it is very often the case that we do not understand a conversation we have recorded (for exactly the same reasons). Finally, the third proposition derives from the observation I have made about the uses of *parce que* in conversation.

If these propositions are plausible, it is not surprising that the more linguistic perspective (argumentation theory), is less suited to account for conversation, while the more pragmatic approach (which assumes the linguistic under-determination of interpretation) is more suited to account for conversation.

## 7. Conclusion

The conclusion I would like to draw is very simple. As I stated at the beginning, conversation is not, for theoretical and empirical reasons, necessarily relevant for pragmatic theory or relevance theory. But, as token-units, conversations yield empirical data which cannot be explained by a constrained theory of discourse. Moreover, any description of pragmatic markers which aims to achieve descriptive and explanatory adequacy must be able to account for conversational data. I have tried to show that this is not possible within a discourse theory, and that this empirical criterion could be satisfied within a cognitive pragmatic theory like relevance theory.

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