

Research on the Discourse Function of Connectives: Types and Representations

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Abstract: Relevant to linguistic units, connectives are connecting tools, words or word groups, that allow for connecting words, clauses, or sentences and structuring a text. Connectives research has been clearly evolving. From the very beginning, connectives are described with a traditional approach as connecting elements between and within statements, without a really specific function, except simple grammatical connection. As an invariable language entity or fixed statement, connectives can not only associate the current statement with the previous statement, but also associate it with the overall context of the construction, which can contribute to the overall consistency of the text. In French, the connector “mais” generally marks a relationship of opposition and concession. The distinction between two types of “mais” made by Ducrot and generally accepted by pragmatists therefore serves as the basis for this analysis and must be presented.

Keywords: Connectives; Discursive Function; Representation; Scope of Connectives

1. Introduction

One of the most important aspects of good writing in a language is the ability to connect clauses, sentences and paragraphs together through what are called “discourse markers”. There are a large number of words and phrases that have exactly this function. Connectives are words that reflect the semantic relationship between sentences and paragraphs. By using conjunctions appropriately, the author is able to express their thoughts coherently and logically, while also helping readers better understand the logical relationships between sentences and paragraphs. Connective words can enhance the coherence and readability of an article, and can be used to express explanations, emphasis, examples, progression or supplementation, comparison, contrast, concession, symmetry,

conditions, causality, purpose and summary. There is abundant literature on connectives in the French and Chinese languages. Especially since 1975, when Ducrot and his collaborators showed a particular interest in the studies of conjunctions *car*, *parce que* and *puisque*. And traditionally, “these words are described as elements of connection between and within statements, without a really specific function beyond the simple phraseological connection [1]”.

Connectives are widely used in Chinese and French to achieve discourse progression and semantic coherence. In order to define the subject of our study, this article will report the definitions of the connectives in both languages.

2. Different Definitions of the Connectives

For a word, a good definition allows the reader to “find the information without conducting a componential analysis [2]”.

According to *the Dictionary of Discourse Analysis*: “In the article ‘word’ of the eighteenth-century *Methodological Encyclopedia*, N. Beauzée already placed the conjunctions in the category of what he calls ‘discursive words’, units that make up the connections of propositions, what constitutes the force, the soul and the life of discourse. At the same time, in his *Course of Rhetoric and Fine Letters*, the Scotsman H. Blair placed conjunctions such as ‘as’, ‘because’, ‘although’ in the category of ‘connectives’ that are generally used to connect sentences or sentence members [...] It is the right or wrong use of these connective particles that gives discourse a firm and structured or, on the contrary, incoherent and loose air, which makes the discourse look like it is not. (1788).”[3]

Language evolves with society, which is reflected in the definition of connectives. The function of language units is to signify a relationship between other units of discourse, which arouses the interest of the linguist to question the relations between syntax and

semantics, logic and linguistics, system and discourse, sign and implicit. Relevant to linguistic units, connectives are connecting tools, words or word groups, that allow for connecting words, clauses, or sentences and structuring a text.

3. Discursive Function of Connectives in French

Harris was the first linguist to use the term “connective” in the analysis of languages. Connectives are words or phrases that are invariant and belong to different grammatical classes, marking a relationship of meaning between propositions, sentences, or parts of a text. Sentences consist of words, and from this point, most Western linguists agree that the word was the only meaningful unit until the end of the 18th century, and the definition of the word generally remained implicit. The classification list of words established by the 4th-century grammarian Aelius Donatus already contains eight classes[4]: name, pronoun, verb, participate, conjunction, adverb, preposition, interjection. This list served as the basis for many school French grammars.

Connectives research has been clearly evolving. A large number of linguistic works have successively entered our horizon since 1975. Overall, it is said that several theories of connectors have been formulated, respectively: in France around Oswald Ducrot and J.-C. Anscombre, in Switzerland around Eddy Roulet and also A. Berrendonner, finally in the context of the theory of relevance founded by D. Sperber and D. Wilson, with J. Moeschler and J.-M. Luscher. Among them is the theory of O. Ducrot is the best known.

From the very beginning, connectives are described with a traditional approach as connecting elements between and within statements, without a really specific function, except simple grammatical connection. “However, the diversity and quantity of these grammatical words can play such a spreading role, and the idea that they must play a certain role in the emerging pragmatism will lead to marking them as discourse keywords (Ducrot *et*

al., 1980), or more specifically, connectives (pragmatism, argumentation, etc.).”[1]

Ducrot’s pragmatic work on “words of discourse” (1980) enriched the content of modern linguistics, and this pushed research into connectives: “the reflection on adverbs, conjunctions and conjunctive locutions that play a role of connection between units of discourse has developed in linguistics.”[3]

Connectives contribute to what can be called the “text effect”. From the point of view of grammatical categories that can provide units to play the role of a connective, we generally retain: the coordination conjunctions: *et, mais, car, donc*, etc.; some adverbs: *soudain, aussitôt, enfin, cependant, toutefois*, etc.; locutions: *en effet, quand même, malgré tout, dès lors, le lendemain*, etc.; pre-positional groups: *à ce moment-là, à huit heures du matin, sur la gauche*, etc.; as well as subordination connections.

There are several types of text connectives:

- ✧ Temporary: *il était une fois/ soudain/ enfin, finalement, désormais...* ;
- ✧ Enumeratives: *d’abord.../ puis (et, alors, ensuite, de même...)/ enfin* ;
- ✧ Space: *devant/ derrière / plus loin/ au loin ; en haut /au milieu/ en bas...* ;
- ✧ Argumentation or explanation: *tout d’abord (premièrement, pour commencer, avant toute chose....)/ ensuite (par ailleurs, d’autre part, d’ailleurs...)/ par contre (inversement, mais, toutefois, pourtant...)/ par conséquent (ainsi, c’est pourquoi, donc, en tout cas...).*

Adopting a pragmatic and textual point of view, *the Dictionary of Discourse Analysis*[3] “places on a continuum several types of connectors that certainly fulfill the same binding function between units of different rank (proposal or packages of proposals), but that (1) either ensure this **simple connection function**, (2) either add to this function a **marking role** of (re)enunciative support, (3) or complete these two functions by a marked **argumentative orientation**.”

The article cite here in detail these three types[3], which makes it possible to put the discursive function of the connectives in the forefront:

A. Segmenting and Relating: The Simple Connection (The Organizers)

Function common to (1), (2) and (3)

$Proposition(s) p \xleftarrow{\text{close}} \langle C \rangle \xrightarrow{\text{open}} Proposition(s) q$

B. Enunciatively Mark (E) A Partion of Text: Connection Combined with Enunciative Support

Function common to (2) and (3)

$$\text{Proposition(s) } p(E) \xleftarrow{\text{<C>}} \text{Proposition(s) } q(E)$$

E1 enunciatively indexed zone][E2 enunciatively indexed zone

C. Argumentatively Oriented: Argumentative Connectives

Function common to (3)

$$\text{Proposition(s) } p \xleftarrow{\text{<C>}} \text{Proposition(s) } q$$

Instruction to reprocess p as: Instruction to reprocess q as:

Argument or Supporting Argument or Conclusion or Counter-Argument

Counter-argument or Conclusion or Supporting Argument or Argument

As an invariable language entity or fixed statement, connectives can not only associate the current statement with the previous statement, but also associate it with the overall context of the construction, which can contribute to the overall consistency of the text.

Ducrot was particularly interested in markers that play a role in strategies that challenge pragmatic elements, he conducted studies on connectives in the context of pragmatics integrated into semantics, his most important research is devoted to the connective “mais” [5]. The distinction between two types of “mais” made by Ducrot and generally accepted by pragmatists therefore serves as the basis for this analysis and must be presented.

Dominique Maingueneau considers that research on discourse involves a permanent interaction between two main principles of grouping researchers: groupings by discourse disciplines and currents, and then a grouping by territories. First, groupings by *discourse disciplines* and by *currents* (integrated or not in a discipline). Researchers share a number of conceptual and methodological postulates and “resources”; It is nevertheless understood that this “sharing” is more to be thought of as the Wittgensteinian air of family than as the necessary and sufficient conditions for belonging to a class. Secondly, a grouping by *territory*, which itself can be done at two distinct levels: a) groupings of discourse linguists who do not belong to the same currents

or disciplines; (b) groups of discourse linguists and researchers in other fields. [6] According to him, these various forms of grouping produce a confusing and unstable landscape. The same applies to work on the “resources” common to discourse linguists (such as some studies on thematization, connectors, polyphony, etc.).

The connector “mais” has been the subject of countless studies in various approaches, such as logic, syntax and semantics. Since the pioneering work of Oswald Ducrot, this connector has been considered the pivot of concessional structures, which nevertheless has a considerable weight.

In French, the connector “mais” generally marks a relationship of opposition and concession: this connector introduces “a relationship of opposition and restriction” [7], it is one of the connectors of the category “opposition-concession”. Due to its high frequency and its connection to the implicit, this connector is of certain interest for the analysis of discourse, and which is the most studied connector by pragmatists especially from the 1980s: “it is difficult, once one has begun to observe it, not to be fascinated by the conjunction *mais*”.

Ducrot et al. examined the meaning effects of “mais” in different textual sequences, and a classification of its uses has been proposed in the chapter on “mais” entitled *Mais occupe-toi d'Amélie* in *Les mots du discours* in Table 1 [8]:

Table 1. The Meaning Effects of “mais”

	Function	Example
“mais”	of transition :	<i>Mais revenons à notre sujet !</i>
	of approbation :	<i>Mais vous avez raison !</i>
	of addition :	<i>non seulement..., mais encore...</i>
	of reinforcement :	<i>On ne lui a donné rien à faire, mais ce qui s'appelle rien.</i>
	by invitation :	<i>Mais venez donc déjeuner !</i>

According to Ducrot, the original title of Feydeau's play *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* contains no *mais*. The addition of a *mais*, which turns order into reproach, and otherwise incompatible with the content of the piece. Quite the contrary.

“The connectors *pero* and *aber* function as

*argumentative connectors and connect two statements that lead to opposite conclusions, while **sino** and **sondern** serve to connect two discursive segments, the latter of which rectifies the former; They will have an adverse meaning.*” [9]. The operation of the interactive

connector “mais” was studied by Anscombe & Ducrot[10]. They indicate that there are two *mais*: a *mais*SN, a *mais*PA, which have quite different syntactic or distributional properties. In other words: **the “mais” of refutation and the “mais” of concession**. In order to facilitate research on comparative linguistics, they proposed these two names in Table 2: *mais*SN and *mais*PA. Contrary to the morphological identity of a single “mais” in French that covers two semantic functions, the conjunction corresponding to “mais” is expressed by two different morphemes in Spanish (*pero* and *sino*) and in German (*aber* and *sondern*). “*The French also has this distinction - mais in a hidden form: under the material identity of the morpheme mais, there is in fact a mais-PA and a mais-SN identifiable by different distributional properties.*”

Table 2. Two *mais*

	<i>mais</i> of opposition	<i>mais</i> of concession
In French	<i>mais-PA</i>	<i>mais-SN</i>
In Spanish	<i>pero</i>	<i>sino</i>
In German	<i>aber</i>	<i>sondern</i>

4. Different Connective Definitions and Classification in Chinese

At present, there are relatively few direct studies on connectives in China, and there are also differences in the definition of connectives among linguists.

Ontological research on textual linguistics in China focuses mainly on the study of discursive phenomena such as cohesion and coherence, while applied research focuses on textual teaching-learning[11]. Hu Zhuanglin’s idea of multi-level cohesion and coherence broadens the horizon of Chinese connection. Zhao Weibin found that adverse connectives are the most commonly used bonding means in the text.

Wang Weixian notes that in modern Chinese, “copule”, “correlative”, “ligature”, or “relation words”, etc., are often used to designate connection words. Wang Weixian defines “connection words” in the *Dictionary of Grammar* (Yufaxue cidian) as follows: Wang Weixian remarque que dans le chinois moderne, « la copule », « le corrélatif », « la ligature » ou « les mots de relation » etc., sont souvent utilisés pour désigner les mots de liaison [12]:

➤ *These are conjunctions, adverbs and certain words in a certain logical relationship between the different clauses within complex sentences;*

➤ *These are conjunctions, adverbs and certain words related to different language forms (words, locutions, clauses, phrases). That is, linking words are not only associated with clauses;*

➤ *Also known as “conjunctive words”, they refer specifically to all the locutions and clauses that can be considered a conjunction..*

Huang Borong *et al.* believe that in grammatical nature, connectives are not limited to traditional conjunctions, all language units that indicate connections and relationships related to the grammatical unity of sentences or higher, are considered as connectives that possess many grammatical types such as conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs, etc. In the textual structure of Chinese, connectives can be divided into independent connectives, ligature, dependent connectives and other types.

Li Yancui *et al.* further noted that a connective mainly refers to words to connect the different units and represent this semantic relationship, which generally do not assume the syntactic elements in the sentence, nor the role of modification and determination, it is very often the role of conjunctions, ligature and other equivalent linguistic units carrying the role of connection. Connectives are words that connect and illustrate sentence logic in complex sentences, groups of sentences, or texts. Wang Zhenlai considers that the effects of the connectives on the local coherence of discourse are mainly marked by the role of brand and connection. Zong Meng studied the positions of subordinate conjunctions and subordinate propositions in modern Chinese by analyzing the syntactic behavior and the positions of the subordinators.[13] Pu Kezhi studied on the errors of sequential cohesive words in foreign students[14]; Li Jingjing did research on the use of discourse cohesion “suoyi”, “jiushi” and “ranhou” in informal talks and teaching suggestions[15].

The characteristics of connection words are mainly: bivalent, do not accept any modification of the language components; By generally taking the role of connection in discourse, connection words do not serve as syntactic elements, but there are also connection words that serve as syntactic elements by taking their connection functions.

5. Conclusions

Connection words fall into the category of

“empty words” and, research on this kind of word is relatively neglected by linguists. In this field of research, there is the will-debate dyad of linguists: the desire to establish a boundary between conjunction and conjunctive adverb dates back a long time; The debate focused mainly on conjunctive function adverbs.

Connectives are a necessary auxiliary means to strengthen or concretize the specific grammatical relationship and semantics, which is why the connection is central, the core of this function is to determine certain logical relations between the functional units of the language. Words are the foundation of discourse existence, and discourse is the extension and promotion of the inherent referential and coherent functions of words. Clarifying the scope of connectives is helpful for hierarchical analysis of complex sentences, sentence groups or texts.

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