Clause ‘Subordination’ and Discourse Relations

Laurence Delort – Université Paris 7

DGfS-06 Workshop
‘Subordination’ vs. ‘Coordination’ in Sentence and Text
From a Cross-linguistic Perspective

February 22-24, 2006 – Bielefeld University
Discourse Structure

- discourse coherence governed by underlying discourse relations
- a discourse relation (DR) is a predicate taking two discourse units (DU) as arguments

DR

DU1

DU2

- DRs + DUs = discourse structure
Discourse Structure

- discourse coherence governed by underlying discourse relations
- a discourse relation (DR) is a predicate taking two discourse units (DU) as arguments

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DR
  /   \
DU1   DU2
```

- DRs + DUs = discourse structure
syntactically well-formed discourse governed by syntactic relations, that discourse connectives can explicit

- a discourse connective (DC) is a predicate taking two clauses (C) as arguments

\[
\text{DC} \quad \text{C1} \quad \text{C2}
\]

- DCs + Cs = clause combining
- cf. (Lehmann, 1988)
syntactically well-formed discourse governed by syntactic relations, that discourse connectives can explicit

a discourse connective (DC) is a predicate taking two clauses (C) as arguments

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\text{DC} \quad \text{C1} \quad \text{C2}
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\[\text{DCs + Cs = clause combining}\]
\[\text{cf. (Lehmann, 1988)}\]
parallel between clause combining and discourse structure

a DC between two clauses is taken to convey a DR between two DUs

cf. (Knott, 1996), for instance

in NLU tasks
  easy to identify DCs for determining the underlying DR

in NLG tasks
  easy to lexicalize a DR with one or several DC(s)
parallel between clause combining and discourse structure

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cf. (Knott, 1996), for instance

- in NLU tasks
  easy to identify DCs for determining the underlying DR
- in NLG tasks
  easy to lexicalize a DR with one or several DC(s)
parallel between clause combining and discourse structure
- a DC between two clauses is taken to convey a DR between two DUs

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DC} \\
\downarrow \\
C_1 & C_2
\end{array}
\quad \Rightarrow 
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DR} \\
\downarrow \\
DU_1 & DU_2
\end{array}
\]

- cf. (Knott, 1996), for instance
- in NLU tasks
  easy to identify DCs for determining the underlying DR
- in NLG tasks
  easy to lexicalize a DR with one or several DC(s)
is there a real parallel between clause combining and discourse structure?

does a clause always give rise to a DU?

does a DC always convey a DR?

- a closer look at subordination
  - at the clause level
  - at the discourse level

- examination of two French subordinating conjunctions
  - “avant que” (English “before”)
  - “parce que” (English “because”)

in this talk, I focus on “avant que”
Questions & Goal of the Talk

- is there a real parallel between clause combining and discourse structure?
- does a clause always give rise to a DU?
- does a DC always convey a DR?

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- in this talk, I focus on “avant que”
some DUs play important roles, while some DUs play subordinate roles in discourse

- DUs can be
  - either nuclei
  - or satellites
- DRs can be
  - either subordinating taking as arguments a nucleus and a satellite
  - or coordinating taking as arguments two nuclei
- cf. G&S, RST, SDRT
Hierarchical Discourse Structure

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Formal Representations

- dependency graph
  
  Subord DR
  
  Nucleus → Satellite

- RST diagram
  
  Subord DR
  
  N → S

- SDRT graph
  
  N
  
  Subord DR
  
  S

Subordination in Discourse and Grammar
An Alternative View of Discourse Subordination
Concluding Remarks
deletion of satellites
only satellites can be removed without perturbing discourse coherence

“nuclearity principle”, cf. (Marcu, 1996)
only nuclei can be arguments of DRs

(1) Lisa prepared a pizza while Bart was sleeping. So he is happy.
Subordination in grammar

- degree of integration of a clause into another clause
  - subordination, hypotaxis: governed clause
  - coordination, parataxis: independent clause

Subordinating Conjunction

Main C1

Subordinate C2

Coordinating Conjunction

Main C1

Main C2

cf. (Lehmann, 1988), for instance
Subord DR and Connectives

- In NLU
  - A subordinating conjunction lexicalizes a Subord DR
  - Cf. (Matthiessen & Thompson, 1988)

- In NLG
  - A Subord DR is lexicalized by a subordinating conjunction
  - Cf. (Scott & de Souza, 1990)
Subord DR and Connectives

- in NLU
  a subordinating conjunction lexicalizes a Subord DR
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Subordinating Conjunction

Main C1

Subordinate C2

Subordinating DR

Nucleus DU1

Satellite DU2

- in NLG
  a Subord DR is lexicalized by a subordinating conjunction
- cf. (Scott & de Souza, 1990)
Coord DR and Connectives

- In NLU
  a coordinating conjunction lexicalizes a Coord DR
- Cf. (Matthiessen & Thompson, 1988)

Coordinating Conjunction

Main C1

Main C2

Coordinating DR

Nucleus DU1

Nucleus DU2

- In NLG
  a Coord DR is lexicalized by a coordinating conjunction
- Cf. (Scott & de Souza, 1990)
Coord DR and Connectives

- In NLU
  A coordinating conjunction lexicalizes a Coord DR
- Cf. (Matthiessen & Thompson, 1988)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Coordinating Conjunction} & \quad \rightarrow \\
\text{Main C1} & \quad \text{Main C2}
\end{align*}
\]

- In NLG
  A Coord DR is lexicalized by a coordinating conjunction
- Cf. (Scott & de Souza, 1990)
satellites can be deleted, but sometimes they cannot

(2) Lisa played the saxo while Bart was sleeping. So he is furious.

DU2 has a role in the interpretation of the whole discourse
nuclearity principle doesn’t allow the good interpretation
Questions

- is there a real parallel between clause subordination and discourse subordination?
- is DU2 a real discourse unit?
- does a subordinating conjunction always convey a DR?
(corpus-based) analysis of the French subordinating conjunction “avant que” from different points of view:
- syntactic
- semantic
- pragmatic
- discursive

with the following hypothesis: “avant que” can convey
- a relation between events, not between DUs
- a DR between DUs, but not a subordinating one
(3) Lisa a embarqué avant qu’elle soit enregistrée.
Lisa went on board before she checked in.

- DU2 can be preposed:
  Avant qu’elle soit enregistrée, Lisa a embarqué.

- DU2 can be clefted:
  C’est avant qu’elle soit enregistrée que Lisa a embarqué.

- the temporal relation conveyed by “avant que” can be denied:
  Lisa n’a pas embarqué avant qu’elle soit enregistrée (mais après).

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Syntactic viewpoint

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 ➤ syntactic dependence of DU2
(3) Lisa a embarqué avant qu’elle soit enregistrée. Lisa went on board before she checked in.

- DU1+DU2 is an answer to the question: When did Lisa go on board?
- DU2 conveys the circumstances of the main event described in DU1
- the meaning of the whole sentence is the combination of the meanings of DU1 and DU2 (meaning compositionality)

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(3) Lisa a embarqué avant qu’elle soit enregistrée. 
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- DU2 has no illocutionary force
  ?Lisa a embarqué avant que, heureusement, elle soit enregistrée.
- DU2 doesn’t make a speech act by itself, but it contributes to the speech act made by the whole sentence
  ➤ pragmatic dependence of DU2
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➡️ pragmatic dependence of DU2
(3’) Lisa a embarqué avant qu’elle soit enregistrée. C’est plutôt surprenant.
Lisa went on board before she checked in. This is quite surprising.

- DU3 is attached to the combination DU1+DU2 (via Comment), not to DU2 only
- DU2 cannot be deleted, as satellites can usually be
- DU2 is not necessarily a real DU with a rhetorical and structural role in the discourse
- discursive dependence of DU2
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“Avant que” does not convey any DR

- It seems that “avant que” doesn’t trigger Circumstance

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"avant que"
Main C1 Subordinate C2
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- But denotes a conceptual relation, like ‘precede’, between two events

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"avant que"
Main C1 Subordinate C2
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precede
event e1 event e2
```

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Clause ‘Subordination’ and Discourse Relations
Syntactic viewpoint

(4) Lisa a embarqué avant que l’hôtesse l’accueille chaleureusement.
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  # Avant que l’hôtesse l’accueille chaleureusement, Lisa a embarqué.

- DU2 cannot be clefted:
  # C’est avant que l’hôtesse l’accueille chaleureusement que Lisa a embarqué.

- the temporal relation conveyed by “avant que” cannot be denied (narrow scope of the negation on the VP):
  Lisa n’a pas embarqué avant que l’hôtesse l’accueille chaleureusement.

- syntactic independence of DU2 (cf. “main clause phenomena” in (Green, 1976))
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- DU1+DU2 is an answer to the question: What happens?
- DU2 conveys a relevant event in a story: e1 occurs, then e2 occurs
- DU2 doesn’t contribute to the meaning neither of DU1, nor of the whole sentence (no compositionality)

Semantic independence of DU2
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- discursive independence of DU2
it seems that “avant que” can trigger a DR
but not a subordinating one
Summary on “avant que”

- a subordinate clause introduced by “avant que”
  - doesn’t give rise to a discourse unit
  - cannot be deleted because it denotes a relevant background material

- a main clause introduced by “avant que”
  - gives rise to a discourse unit (a nucleus)
  - cannot be deleted because it denotes a relevant event in a story

- only “real” DUs that work as satellites can be deleted

- this could be also improved by
  - prosodic observations, cf. (Degand & Simon, 2005)
  - cross-linguistic observations, cf. this workshop
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  - gives rise to a discourse unit (a nucleus)
  - cannot be deleted because it denotes a relevant event in a story

- only “real” DUs that work as satellites can be deleted

- this could be also improved by
  - prosodic observations, cf. (Degand & Simon, 2005)
  - cross-linguistic observations, cf. this workshop
a subordinating conjunction may convey
- either a circumstantial (conceptual) relation between events, when it introduces a subordinate clause
- or a DR between DUs, when it introduces a main clause

when a DR is conveyed, it may be
- either a coordinating DR (e.g. Narration)
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- two types of discourse subordination
  - intra-DU, i.e. in one DU
  - inter-DUs, i.e. between two separate DUs

- what kind of discourse structure?
  - main structure (main story line, topic continuation)
  - sub-structure (relevant background material, topic elaboration)
  - side structure (non relevant background material, topic digression)

- following (van Kuppevelt, 1995)
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Thank You! Danke! Merci!

Questions?