A Relevance-Based Approach to English Discourse Connectives*

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Suh, Sung-Kyo. 2000. A Relevance-Based Approach to English Discourse Connectives. *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Korea*, *8*(3), 65-85. In this paper, I attempt to discuss some problems of English discourse connectives with respect to the relevance theory. Coherence theorists regard them as guiding the assignment of coherence relations and relevance theorists regard them as guiding the search for relevance. Coherence-based approaches tend to think in terms of texts, and relevance-based approaches in terms of process. Coherence-based approaches appeal to coherence relations, while relevance theorists appeal to contextual effects. Within the framework of relevance theory, I'll show discourse connectives link not two discourse units but an utterance and a context or contextual effects. Secondly, I'll discuss the relevance based approach to discourse connectives has more explanatory value than the coherence based one with respect to their truth-conditionality. Finally, I'll discuss the function of the various discourse connectives is not necessarily linked to a particular contextual effect. **(Hanlyo University)**

1. Introduction

Humans tend to pay attention to what is relevant to them. They form the most relevant possible representations of these phenomena, and process them in a context that maximizes their relevance. Sperber and Wilson (1986) claim that relevance, and the maximization of relevance, is the key to human cognition. This has consequences for the communicator: by demanding attention from the audience he suggests

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that the information he is offering is relevant enough to be worth the audience's attention. Thus relevance is the key to communication.

Coherence theorists assume that discourse connectives link two discourse units, usually understood as two consecutive clauses. But they do not. I'll argue that discourse connectives link an utterance and a context or contextual effects.

Coherence theorists believe that discourse connectives resist truth-conditional treatment. However they do not. I'll show the relevance based approach to discourse connectives has more explanatory value than the coherence based one.

I'll discuss two approaches to discourse connectives within the framework of relevance theory. Blakemore (1992) argues that discussion of discourse connectives has been restricted to the cases in which an expression is used to indicate how the utterance it introduces is relevant in a context which is made accessible by the interpretation of the preceding utterance. However, many of these so-called 'connectives' can be used to constrain the interpretation of an utterance even though they are not used to connect two segments of text. I'll argue that the function of the various discourse connectives is not necessarily linked to a particular contextual effect.

2. A Study on Discourse Connectives

In this section, I'll discuss the coherence-based approaches to discourse connectives, and comparing them with the relevance-based approach.

Discourse connectives are words such as 'so', 'but', 'after all', 'therefore', 'however', which typically connect two utterances or clauses. Mann and Thompson (1986) call them 'constraints on coherence', while Blakemore (1987) calls them 'constraints on relevance'.

Coherence theorists regard them as guiding the assignment of coherence relations and relevance theorists regard them as guiding the

search for relevance. Let us take an example to illustrate how the analysis might go.

(1) a. It's Sunday, but the drugstores are open.

Coherence theorists treat 'but' as compatible with a range of possible coherence relation, such as Contrast, Antithesis, Contrastive Causes-Consequence.[1] Sanders, Spooren and Noordman (1993) see each relation as analyzable into a set of features. Contrastive Cause-Consequence, for example, would be Causal, Semantic, Basic Order and Negative, and the discourse markers are seen as explicit guides to the range of possible coherence relations.

Relevance theorists, for example Blakemore (1987), treat 'but' as guiding the interpretation process by narrowing down the search for intended context and contextual effects. In her framework, too, it can convey either contrast or denial of expectation. It does this not by indicating coherence relations but by indicating directly the type of contextual effect the speaker expects the hearer to find. The second part of the utterance, in denial of expectation uses, is intended to contradict and eliminate an implication of the first part.

Coherence-based approaches tend to think in terms of texts, and relevance-based approaches in terms of process. Coherence-based approaches appeal to coherence relations, while relevance theorists appeal to contextual effects. From the above example, where both approaches can handle contrast and denial-of-expectation cases, it might appear that they do not.

2.1 Coherence-based approach to discourse connectives

Levinson (1983) represents her arguments about discourse connectives as a coherence theorist.

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1. It means 'denial of expectation'.

> There are many words and phrases in English, and no
> doubt most languages, that indicate the relationship between
> an utterance and the prior discourse. Examples are
> utterance-initial uses of but, therefore, in conclusion, to the
> contrary, still, however, anyway, well, besides, actually, all
> in all, so, after all, and so on. It is generally conceded that
> such words have at least a component of meaning that
> resists truth-conditional treatment (Grice, 1975; Wilson, 1975;
> Levinson, 1979b). What they seem to do is indicate, often in
> very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains
> them is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of
> the prior discourse. (Levinson 1983: 87-88)

In this quotation she suggests some important points. (i) such words
(discourse connectives) resist truth-conditional treatment, (ii) examples
(discourse connectives) are utterance initial uses of but, therefore, in
conclusion, to the contrary ... (iii) that indicate the relationship between
an utterance and the prior discourse (signalling a coherence relationship
between the utterance). Most coherence theorists share these
assumptions. Let us look their arguments more closely.

2.2 Relevance-based approach to discourse connectives

2.2.1 What do discourse connectives link?

I will discuss some properties of discourse connectives with regard to
the above (ii) and (iii). What do connectives link? Do they link the
utterance they introduce with previous discourse units, as coherence
theorists believe, or do they link that utterance with a context, which
may be verbal but often is not, as relevance theorists argue? And what
are the implications of taking one or the other view for building an
adequate account of the role of connectives in communication?

Relevance theory and coherence theory take very different views on

communication and that has consequences for the analysis of connectives suggested by each of these frameworks.

For coherence theorists connectives link two discourse units, usually understood as two consecutive clauses. I shall argue, following Villy Rouchota (1996), that they do not. For relevance theorists, on the other hand, connectives link an utterance and a context or contextual effects. The context that a particular connective suggests may be verbal but it doesn't have to. Let us consider some of her examples:

(2) a. (context: Peter comes home from work at 3:00)
        Mary: But you had to work late shift today.
    b. (context: Peter is back form jogging)
        Mary: So you're trying to keep fit.
    c. (context: Peter has his leg in plaster)
        Mary: Even a small child would have seen that manhole.
                                        (Villy Rouchota 1996: 204)

Such examples suggest that the fact that 'but', 'also', 'too', etc. often connect two utterances is in some sense accident. What is crucial, say for 'but', is that it indicates that the proposition it introduces denies some other contextually manifest proposition, which may have been verbally expressed but does not have to. So, such examples, provide good support for the relevance-theoretic account of connectives. On the other hand, there is no way that the coherence based approach could account for these examples. Remember that what it says is that connectives connect two discourse units. Certain connectives cannot occur discourse initially:

(3) a. (context: Peter is eating a beefsteak)
        Mary: *Whereas your wife only eats salads.
    b. (context: Peter is watering the garden)
        Mary: *Moreover, you mowed the grass.
    c. (context: Peter is doing the dishes)
        Mary: *However/*Nevertheless, you never clean the bathroom.

> d. (context: Peter comes in laden with parcels)
>   Mary: *Therefore, you've spent all your money.

The coherence-based approach can explain the infelicity of these examples: connectives link two discourse units and here there is only one. Within the relevance theoretic account, however, some explanation has to be given for such examples.

Villy Rouchota (1996) finds the solution by the consideration of their syntactic and/or semantic properties. That is, one of the things that is not usually discussed in accounts of discourse connectives is their syntactic status. She suggests that syntactic considerations provide at least a partial solution of the problems.

Some of the connectives under discussion here are conjunctions, for example 'but', they can only occur at the beginning of the clause they introduce. Other connectives have more of an adverbial nature, for instance 'after all', 'indeed', 'also'. Among the connectives that cannot occur discourse initially 'whereas' is a conjunction. 'Therefore', 'moreover', 'however', 'nevertheless' are adverbials, behaving a lot like parentheticals:[2] they may occur utterance initially, finally or in mid-sentence position.

Conjunctions link two clauses, for instance the coordinator 'and', or they may be subordinators. That is, subordinating the clause they introduce to another clause, for instance 'because'. The suggestion Villy Rouchta investigates with respect to 'whereas' is that it is a subordinating conjunction and as such cannot introduce a clause discourse initially where there is no main clause. Its syntactic nature requires that the sentence it introduces is embedded. The following examples shows that subordinating conjunctions like 'because', 'after', 'in order to', etc cannot discourse initially:

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2. For more discussion of parentheticals within the relevance theory, see Elly Ifantidou (1993: 193-210).

(4) a. (context: Mary knows that Jane's boyfriend beats her and
        that she wants to split up; Jane walks in covered in bruises)
        Mary: *Because you threatened to leave him.
    b. (context: Jane walks in in her black dress)
        Mary: *In order to go to Peter's party.

(Villy Rouchota 1996: 206)

This suggests the following way of determining whether 'whereas' is a subordinator. In the following dialogues consider whether the second utterance has to be understood as a continuation/completion of the first one. The utterance under consideration is introduced by a subordinating conjunction.

(5) a. Peter: I'm not going to return any of the money I borrowed
            from you.
        Mary: Because I don't want to live with you any more.
    b. Peter: Sound investments like mine never endanger the company.
        Mary: Whereas unsound ones like mine always do.

(Villy Rouchota 1996: 206)

The utterance introduced by 'because', 'after' and 'whereas' have to be understood as continuing the previous utterance. This suggests that 'whereas' is a subordinator like 'because' and 'after'.

One more evidence that Villy Rouchota suggests is syntactic tests. There are syntactic tests to determine whether an utterance introduced by a certain connective is subordinate to the previous utterance or not. If the second clause is syntactically subordinated to the first, then a quantifier or quantified NP including 'any' in the first clause can bind a pronoun in the second clause.

(6) a. Anyone$_i$ would say that he$_i$ likes Mary.
    b. Paul didn't hire any ballerina$_i$ because he liked her$_i$ looks.
    c. *Everybody$_i$ left and he$_i$ went home.

    d. Every ballerina$_i$ got pregnant whereas she$_i$ should have
       chosen not to.   (Villy Rouchota 1996: 207)

On the basis of this test 'whereas' is clearly a subordinating conjunction. The conclusion is that 'whereas' is a subordinating conjunction. So, it is not surprising that an utterance introduced by 'whereas' cannot occur discourse initially by itself. The subordinating nature of 'whereas' requires that the sentence it introduces is embedded.

2.2.2 Truth-conditional or Non-truth-conditional

Now I will show the property of discourse connectives with regard to the above (i), the truth-conditionality. As we saw above, coherence theorists believe that discourse connectives resist truth-conditional treatment. Let us consider their argument more closely. There is a standard test for distinguishing truth-conditional from non-truth-conditional meaning. Its core mechanism consists in embedding the sentence which includes the connective into a conditional and seeing if it falls within the scope of the 'if'. If it does, the connective is truth-conditional, if it does not, it is non-truth-conditional.

The way the test works and the results it yields are best illustrated by using it to prove that 'but' is non-truth-conditional (Wilson 1992). Consider 'but' in (7).

    (7) Mary is here but Sue isn't.

The question is whether the suggestion of contrast carried by 'but' is truth-conditional or not. In other words, are the truth conditional of (7) correctly given in (8a-b) or (9a-c)?

    (8) a. Mary is here.
       b. Sue isn't here.

(9) a. Mary is here.
   b. Sue isn't here.
   c. There is a contrast between the fact Mary is here and the fact that Sue isn't.

It is easier to answer this question when we embed (7) into a conditional, as in (10):

(10) If Mary is here but Sue isn't, we can't vote.

The question now is: under what circumstances is the speaker of (10) claiming that we can't vote? Is she saying that we can't vote if (8a-b) are true, or is she saying that we can't vote if (9a-b) are true? In other words, does (9c) contribute to the truth conditions of (10), or does it remain outside the scope of the 'if ... then' connective?

Clearly, (9c) is not contributing to the truth conditions of the utterance as a whole: it remains outside the scope of 'if ... then'. Hence, the non-truth-conditional status of 'but' is confirmed. The test for truth-conditionality, then, is to embed the doubtful word into a complex utterance, e.g. a conditional or a disjunction, and see whether the alleged 'truth condition' make a contribution to the truth conditions of the utterance as a whole.

Let us run the same test with 'therefore'. In contrast to 'so', 'therefore' cannot occur discourse-initially. According to Blakemore, the reason is the particular semantic properties of 'therefore'. Consider (11):

(11) Bill hit Mary and therefore she was covered in bruises.

If 'therefore' makes no contribution to truth conditions, the speaker of (11) will be saying:

(12) a. Bill hit Mary.
    b. Mary was covered in bruises.

If 'therefore' does make a contribution to truth conditions, then the speaker of (11) will be saying:

(13) a. Bill hit Mary.
      b. Mary was covered in bruises.
      c. Mary was covered in bruises as a result of Bill hitting her.

We can test these analyses by embedding (11) into a conditional, as before:

(14) If Bill hit Mary and therefore she was covered in bruises, she
      will have won her suit for damages.

Question: under what circumstances is the speaker of (14) claiming that Mary will have won her suit for damages: if (12a-b) are true, or if (13a-c) are true? Clearly, this time we get a different result. All the three conditions (13a-c) are truth conditions. As we've surveyed some discourse connectives above, some of them are truth-conditional, others are not. Hence, 'therefore' seems to be making a contribution to truth conditions. Judging from above discussion, the relevance based approach to discourse connectives has more explanatory value than the coherence based one.

Diane Blakemore, in *Semantic Constraints on Relevance* (1987), has analysed certain discourse or pragmatic connectives in procedural terms. Expressions such as 'after all', 'so', 'but', 'however' are not seen as encoding concepts, or as contributing to the truth conditions of utterances, but as indicating to the hearer what type of inference process he is in. But Wilson and Sperber (1990) suggest that not all non-truth-conditional expressions to be analysed in procedural terms.

3. The principle of relevance

According to Sperber and Wilson (1986), people pay attention only to information that seems relevant. A communicator, by claiming an audience's attention, suggests that the information he is offering is relevant enough to be worth the audience's attention. But how exactly can information be relevant? Sperber and Wilson (1986) claim that information is relevant to somebody if it interacts in a certain way with his existing assumptions about the world: as they put it, if it has contextual effects in some context that he has accessible. They claim that contextual effects are of three types: contextual implication; strengthening an existing assumption; and contradiction and eliminating an existing assumption.

Human information processing requires some mental effort and achieves some cognitive effect. Some effect is achieved in terms of alterations to the individual's beliefs: the addition of new beliefs, the cancellation of old beliefs, or merely a change in the degree of his confidence in old beliefs. Wilson and Sperber (1988) characterize a comparative notion of relevance in terms of effort and effect as follows:

(15) Relevance (comparative concept)
  a. Other things being equal, the greater the cognitive effect achieved by the processing of a given piece of information, the greater its relevance for the individual who processes it.
  b. Other things being equal, the greater the effort involved in the processing of a given piece of information, the smaller its relevance   for the individual who processes it. (Wilson and Sperber 1988: 140)
  Relevance is a matter of cognitive effect and processing effort.[3]

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3. So we can formulate Relevance as follow.

$$Relevance = \frac{cognitive\ effect}{procession\ effort}$$

On the effect side, it is in the interest of hearers that speakers offer the most relevant information they have. However, speakers have their own legitimate aims, and as a result may choose to offer some other information which is less than maximally relevant. Even so, to be worth the hearer's attention, this information must yield at least adequate effects, and the speaker manifestly intends the hearer to assume that this is so. On the effort side, there may be different ways of achieving the intended effects, all equally easy for the speaker to adopt, but requiring different amount of processing effort from the hearer. Here, a rational speaker will choose the formulation that is easiest for the hearer to process, and manifestly intends the hearer to assume that this is so. In other words, the presumption of relevance has two parts: a presumption of adequate effect on the one hand, and a presumption of minimally necessary effort on the other.

For an utterance to be understood, it must have one and only one interpretation consistent with the fact that the speaker intended it to seem relevant to the hearer – adequately relevant on the effect side and maximally relevant on the effort side. Wilson and Sperber (1988) say that in this case the interpretation is *consistent with the principle of relevance*, meaning consistent with the particular instantiation of the principle. The speaker's task is to make sure that the interpretation she intends to convey is consistent with the principle of relevance; otherwise, she runs the risk of not being properly understood. The hearer's task is to find the interpretation which is consistent with the principle of relevance; otherwise, he runs the risk of misunderstanding the principle of relevance or not understanding it at all.

Sperber and Wilson suggest that an utterance or other act of communication is optimally relevant when it achieves an adequate range of contextual effects for the minimum justifiable processing effort. The key to their theory of inferential communication is the following principle of relevance:

(16) Principle of relevance
      Every act of ostensive communication communicates the
      presumption of its own optimal relevance.
                                        (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 158)

   Sperber and Wilson draw our attention to the fact that not all
possible interpretations of an utterance will be equally accessible in a
given situation. The set of potential contexts are ordered by their
accessibility. In the same way, the set of potential contextual effects
will be more or less accessible, depending, on the one hand, on the
accessibility of contexts, and on the other hand on the fact that one
contextual implication may be derivable only by using another
contextual as premise. Finally, the various possible propositions that an
utterance may be taken to express will not all be equally accessible, if
only because of ordering in the accessibility of the various potential
referents of its referring expressions.
   The fact that the various possible interpretations of an utterance are
not equally accessible means that they will be tested for consistency
with the principle of relevance not all at once, but in a fixed order.
This means that in the case of disambiguation, for instance, it is not
necessary to consider all the possible interpretations before making a
choice. One interpretation will invariably be more accessible than the
others, and this first accessible interpretation will be the first to be
tested for consistency with the principle of relevance. To make sure this
interpretation problem, Blass (1990) gives the following examples.

   (17) Bob went to the bank.
   (18) Bob went to the river bank.
   (19) Bob went to the financial institution. (Blass 1990: 63)

In a situation where the hearer has assumptions immediately accessible
about Bob rowing on the river, she should have immediate access, via

the encyclopedic entry for 'river' to a context in which interpretation (18) would have adequate contextual effects. In a situation where it is known that Bob wants to deposit a cheque, the hearer should have immediate access via the encyclopedic entry for 'cheque', to a context in which (19) would have adequate contextual effects.

Suppose that the first accessible interpretation of (17), on a given occasion, is (18), and that this interpretation yields adequate contextual effects for the minimum justifiable processing effort, in a way the speaker could manifestly have foreseen. In these circumstances, a speaker intended to convey (19) would have caused the hearer the considerable unnecessary processing effort of first accessing and processing (18), and finding this interpretation acceptable, and then engaging in some further form of inference to choose between the two interpretations. The result could never be consistent with the principle of relevance. Hence, according to Sperber and Wilson, the first accessible interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance is the only interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance, and is the one the hearer should choose (Blass 1990: 60-4).

4. Discourse Connectives in Relevance Theory

Diane Blakemore (1987) suggests that discourse connectives do not contribute to the truth-conditions of an utterance. Also, discourse connectives do not encode concepts.[4] Their meaning has the effect of guiding the hearer towards the context in which he is expected to process her utterance and towards the contextual effects he should draw from it. In a relevance-based framework according to which hearers interpret an utterance in the smallest and most accessible context that

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4. Wilson and Sperber (1993) offer detailed discussion of discourse connectives. They devide several groups of discourse connectives by using the criterion as conceptual/procedural, truth-conditional/non-truth-conditional, contribution to propositional form/higher-level explicature, constraints on implicature/explicature etc.

yields adequate contextual effects for no unjustifiable effort, the existence of such devices is in accord with the principle of relevance. By using them the speaker saves the hearer some processing effort in interpreting her utterance.

Relevance says an utterance may be relevant in one of three ways: by strengthening an existing assumption, by contradicting and eliminating an existing assumption or by combining with old information to yield new information. This suggests that there are at least three types of discourse connectives; (a) discourse connectives concerned with strengthening, for example 'moreover', 'besides', 'after all', etc. (b) discourse connectives which introduce denials, for instance 'but', 'however', 'nevertheless', and (c) discourse connectives which introduce contextual implications, for instance 'therefore' and 'so'.

4.1 Discourse connectives introducing contextual implications

Blakemore (1992) argues that discussion of discourse connectives has been restricted to the cases in which an expression is used to indicate how the utterance it introduces is relevant in a context which is made accessible by the interpretation of the preceding utterance. However, many of these so-called 'connectives' can be used to constrain the interpretation of an utterance even though they are not used to connect two segments of text. The role of 'so' in (20) is exactly the same as its role in (21).

(20) A: You take the first turning on the left.
     B: *So* we don't go fast the university (then).
(21) (*Hearer (who is driving) makes a left turn*)
     So we're not going past the university (then/after all).
                                      (Blakemore 1992: 139)

In both cases the speaker is confirming that the proposition 'so' introduces is indeed a contextural implication of an assumption which

has been made accessible. Whereas in (20) this assumption is made accessible by another utterance, in (21) the speaker is drawing attention to an assumption that he has derived from his observation of an event.

4.2 Discourse connectives concerned with strengthening

The use of 'after all' indicates that the proposition it introduces is an evidence for an assumption which has just been made accessible. In (22) the proposition introduced by 'after all' is relevant as justification for the claim in the first utterance of the sequence.

(22) You have to have another drink. *After all* it is your birthday.
(Blakemore 1992: 140)

In other words, the aim is to increase the strength of the hearer's commitment to the assumption conveyed in the first utterance.

The aim is rather similar in (23), except here speaker B is providing additional evidence for an assumption which is derived from the first segment.

(23) A: Will you make pancakes?
B: I haven't really got time tonight.
Besides there's no milk. (Blakemore 1992: 140)

The suggestion is that the hearer is expected to derived the conclusion in (24) from the proposition expressed by the first utterance 'and' from the proposition expressed by the second utterance.

(24) B will not make pancakes. (Blakemore 1992: 140)

Since a conclusion that is derived from two separate sets of premises will inherit a degree of strength greater than the one that it inherits from either set alone, the effect of presenting the additional evidence is

to strengthen the guarantee that the speaker is offering for the factuality of (24) in his first utterance. Other expressions which introducing additional evidence are 'moreover', 'furthermore' and utterance-initial 'also' (Blakemore 1992: 140).

4.3 Discourse connectives introducing denials

In (25), for example, the use of 'however' indicates that the proposition it introduces is inconsistent with a proposition that the speaker assumes the hearer has derived as a contextual implication from the first utterance.

(25) David is here. However, you can't see him.

This means that the speaker's use of 'however' is appropriate only if he assumes that the speaker has immediate access to contextual assumptions which allow the derivation of the implication that the hearer can see David. And this, of course, is not necessarily the case – the hearer might have brought quite different contextual assumptions to bear and derived quite different contextual implications. The use of 'however' indicates how the speaker thought the hearer would have interpreted the first utterance.

There are a number of other expressions that play this sort of role, for example 'still', 'nevertheless' and 'but'. Evidently, these are not completely interchangeable in all contexts. That is, they do not impose exactly the same constraint.

4.4 Problems of Blakemore's approach

If these analyses are right, we can see that certain discourse connectives can be directly linked to certain types of contextual effects. However, it would be misleading to suppose that all discourse connectives can be directly linked to types of contextual effect in the

way. I will show, following Wilson (1993), this is not the right track. For example consider how (26) might be interpreted:

(26) a. Peter: John got a cold.
     b. Mary: BILL got a cold.

(26b) might be intended as a correction or repair of (26a). On this interpretation, Mary would have been intending to achieve relevance by contradicting and eliminating Peter's assumption that 'John got a cold'. She could have made this interpretation more explicit by saying:

(27) No, BILL got a cold.

Another possibility, however, is that Mary might have been intending to offer an additional piece of information that might achieve relevance in the same way as Peter's utterance. This interpretation could be made explicit by use of 'also' or 'too':

(28) BILL got a cold too.
     Bill ALSO got a cold.

The addition of 'too' or 'also' to (26b) eliminates the possibility that Mary was trying to correct Peter, indicating instead that the two utterances should be processed in parallel, yielding the same or similar effects. So, the function of the various discourse connectives is not necessarily linked to a particular contextual effect. Discourse connectives are effort saving devices which narrow the possibilities of interpretation by making accessible certain contextual assumptions rather than others and indicating the type of inference the hearer is expected to undertake.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I attempt to solve some problems of English discourse connectives with respect to the relevance theory. Coherence theorists

regard them as guiding the assignment of coherence relations and relevance theorists regard them as guiding the search for relevance. Coherence-based approaches tend to think in terms of texts, and relevance-based approaches in terms of process. Coherence-based approaches appeal to coherence relations, while relevance theorists appeal to contextual effects.

Coherence theorists assume that discourse connectives link two discourse units, usually understood as two consecutive clauses. But they do not. For relevance theorists, on the other hand, connectives link an utterance and a context or contextual effects. I also discussed some remaining problems can be solved by the consideration of their syntactic and/or semantic properties.

The test for truth-conditionality, then, is to embed the doubtful word into a complex utterance, e.g. a conditional or a disjunction, and see whether the alleged 'truth condition' make a contribution to the truth conditions of the utterance as a whole. Coherence theorists believe that discourse connectives resist truth-conditional treatment. I showed the relevance based approach to discourse connectives has more explanatory value than the coherence based one.

Finally, I compared two approaches to discourse connectives within the framework of relevance theory. Blakemore (1992) argues that discussion of discourse connectives has been restricted to the cases in which an expression is used to indicate how the utterance it introduces is relevant in a context which is made accessible by the interpretation of the preceding utterance. However, many of these so-called 'connectives' can be used to constrain the interpretation of an utterance even though they are not used to connect two segments of text. I showed the function of the various discourse connectives is not necessarily linked to a particular contextual effect.

In conclusion, discourse connectives are effort saving devices which narrow the possibilities of interpretation by making accessible certain contextual assumptions rather than others and indicating the type of inference the hearer is expected to undertake.

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