

PRAGMATIC CONNECTIVES

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In this paper, the pragmatic function of connectives is discussed. Whereas semantic connectives express relations between denoted facts, pragmatic connectives express relations between speech acts. This paper takes a closer look at the pragmatic connectives *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*, and *if*.

1. Speech act sequences

1.1.

Speech acts usually do not come alone. They may occur in ordered sequences of speech acts accomplished by one speaker or by subsequent speakers, *e.g.* in the course of a conversation. Much in the same way as sentences may occur in sequences which should satisfy a number of constraints, *e.g.* those of semantic coherence, in order to be acceptable as discourses, we should expect that speech act sequences are not arbitrary. They must also satisfy a number of constraints. One of the obvious tasks for an extension of a theory of speech acts within linguistic pragmatics, then, is the formulation of these constraints.

1.2.

Thus, a serious linguistic pragmatics should not only account for speech acts, but also for the relations between speech acts and the ways these relations are expressed in the sentences and texts used to perform such speech act sequences. In this paper we will investigate how speech act sequences relate to sentence sequences, and in particular how these relations are expressed by various natural language connectives.

1.3.

In order to be appropriate, speech act sequences first of all must satisfy the more general conditions on act sequences in interaction. One of the most obvious of these coherence conditions of action is the fact that the final state of action a_i is identical with the initial state of the next action a_{i+1} within the same course of action. Thus, commitments established by a speech act may constitute conditions for the appropriateness of subsequent speech acts (*e.g.* as in the offer-thanks pair).

In general this kind of pragmatic coherence is based on various kinds of conditional relations. The weakest form is that of 'enablement', that is: a speech act makes next speech acts possible. Stronger forms are those of probability and necessity. These 'modalities' must of course be taken in their social, interactional sense. They are based on rules and norms determining what may be done in which conditions. Take for instance the following speech act sequence:

(1) It is cold in here. Could you please shut the window?

Here an assertion is followed by a request — at least according to the usual speech act analyses. At the same time, though, the first speech act may be taken as a 'preparation' for the second. That is, requests are usually made as a consequence of certain wishes and aims of the speaker. Especially when addressed to strangers and when the motivation for the request is not obvious, requests may need an 'explication'. In (1) the first speech act precisely provides such a 'ground' for the following request. If placed after the request, the assertion would provide an 'explanation' for the previous speech act. Depending on context, and on general rules of politeness, such an explanation may be more or less necessary, *viz.* in the sense of a conversational obligation. Similar contingencies determine the sequencing of an accusation and a defense or admission, and, more in general, between a question and an answer. This means that each speech act will be interpreted with respect to neighboring (mostly previous) speech acts.

We say of speech act sequences which are in this way, *i.e.* conditionally, related, that they are *connected*. Connection, however, is only one aspect of the *coherence* of speech act sequences and conversation.

2. Semantic connectives

2.1.

What has been said above about speech acts also holds for sequences of sentences or propositions in a coherent text. Connection constraints in discourse are based on the requirement that the respective facts they denote are, *e.g.* conditionally, related. Often this connection can only be established, formally, on the basis of other facts, which must, so to speak, be interpolated into the (expressed) propositional sequence on the basis of our knowledge of the world (as it is organized in so-called scripts or frames). Other coherence constraints on this semantic level of analysis, *e.g.* relevance of subsequent propositions with respect to some 'topic of discourse' or 'theme' — made explicit in terms of semantic macrostructures — will be ignored here.

2.2.

The factual relations which are the referential basis for textual coherence may be

typically expressed by sentential connectives, such as *and*, *but*, *or*, *although*, *yet*, *because*, *if . . . then*, *etc.* These connectives, and their use, will be called *semantic* because they express relations between propositions and represent relations between the facts which are the denotata of these propositions. Below, this semantic use of the connectives will be distinguished from their *pragmatic* use.

The precise semantics for these connectives will not concern us here. Unlike the classical connectives of logical languages, they are not truth-functional, but intensional. That is, they are described in terms of meaning relations and denoted fact relations (e.g. possibility, probability, necessity of their conditional link). This semantic account of the connectives is however only partial. Some aspects involved are clearly pragmatic and require explication in terms of knowledge and expectations of speaker and hearer. In the rest of this paper we will focus on certain properties of these pragmatic conditions of connectives.

3. Pragmatic connectives

3.1.

We use the term *pragmatic connective* in order to distinguish the pragmatic use of connectives from their semantic use. Pragmatic connectives express relations between speech acts, whereas semantic connectives express relations between denoted facts. This characterization is intentionally vague. That is, we either have different *uses* of the same set of connectives, or else different connective meanings or functions which happen to be expressed by the same expressions. Although the first option seems more plausible and economical, it is not quite obvious. The pragmatic use of connectives may be accompanied by different phonological and syntactic constraints, for instance. Thus, pragmatic connectives will often be sentence-initial, followed by a pause and uttered with a specific intonation contour.

3.2.

One of the difficulties in the analysis of pragmatic connectives lies in the fact that, even when they are used as expressions for relations between speech acts, there may remain traces of their semantic meanings. This is of course not surprising if we assume that each connective has a certain (minimal) meaning which may be further specified depending on its semantic or pragmatic use. At the same time, semantic conditions may underly conditions of pragmatic appropriateness. Thus, denoted facts may be normal conditions for the possible execution of subsequent speech acts.

Our main problem, however, is that we have no unambiguous meta-language to characterize the 'meanings' of the respective pragmatic (uses of) connectives. The proposed readings given below are informal and provisional. Moreover, a description of pragmatic connectives cannot simply be given in terms of certain aspects of meaning (in turn to be based e.g. on truth or satisfaction conditions for proposi-

tions), but requires an interpretation in terms of *functions* with respect to pragmatic contexts.

We will take the major connectives of English and see which pragmatic uses can be made of them. In order to clearly mark the differences with their semantic uses, we will also give examples of cases where they obviously relate propositions and not speech acts.

3.3. *And*

- (2a) Yesterday we went to the movies and afterwards we went to the pub for a beer.
 (2b) Why didn't Peter show up? And, where were you that night?
 (2c) Harry has counted me out. And, I even hadn't had a chance!

In (2a) *and* is used semantically: it expresses a relation between two facts which are ordered in time. In the other examples, no such semantic account seems possible; at least, it is not sufficient. In (2a), sentence initial *And* is used to indicate that the speaker wants to mark that he *adds* something to the first speech act, as is also the case for sentence-initial *Moreover*. The connective is apparently used to signal the fact that the speaker has another question. In other words, its function may be characterized in terms of concepts like 'addition' or 'continuation', which are of course concepts to be defined in terms of relations between speech acts, or between moves or turns in a conversation.

It is well-known that *and* may have a rather neutral or vague meaning. Depending on the meanings of related clauses, it may more specifically also be interpreted as a concessive or conditional. Something similar may occur at the pragmatic level. In (2c) for instance, the speaker may use *And* in order to signal a contradiction or protest, e.g. to prevent the hearer from drawing false conclusions from the first speech act. In this way, pragmatic *And* may have functions similar to pragmatic *But* or *Yet*, which are discussed below. Note, incidentally, that this sentence-initial use of *And* (marked by a capital) is linked to the use of semantic *although* or *but*, as we shall likewise see below.

In the examples given above it becomes clear that it makes sense to speak about connectives for speech acts only if we have speech act sequences of at least two members. Yet, the identification of precisely *one* speech act (and not two or more) on the basis of a given expression, e.g. a complex sentence, is by no means straightforward. This problem, which has been neglected in classical speech act theory, will not be discussed here. If we look at example (2a), though, it is not *a priori* the case that this compound sentence realizes *one* speech act (when it is used in an appropriate context) which happens to have the compound propositional base *p & q*. It could also be argued that we have two subsequent assertions, pragmatically connected by *and*, as in the two other examples. We will provisionally assume that the form of the utterance itself (sentence boundaries, intonation, pauses, etc.) is indica-

tive in this respect for its functioning as one or two speech acts. We will assume that in the given examples sentence boundaries also express speech act limits, without pretending that this one-to-one relation is unproblematical.

3.4. *But*

Although there is a clear distinction between semantic and pragmatic contrastives, it should be emphasized that also the semantic connectives have certain 'pragmatic' implications. Typical for *p but q* is the condition that *p* usually implies $\sim q$, but that *q* (and *p*) are now the case. This form of 'usual' implication is based on world knowledge and specific expectations of speaker and hearer about having *q* when *p* is given. This would require a cognitive analysis or a pragmatics in the broad sense, *i.e.* involving knowledge of speaker and hearer. In:

(3a) Harry was ill, *but* he came to the meeting anyway.

being ill is a normal reason for *not* attending meetings, and hence *but* may be used. Hence, our knowledge about meetings and about John's illness will generate certain expectations of which the speaker will assume that they are shared by the hearer, which requires the use of contrastive *but*. Other semantic properties of *but*, and the details of its pragmatic features will not be discussed. We will focus here on the proper pragmatic use of *but*, as in:

(3b) *A*: Let's go!

B: But, I am not ready yet!

In this small fragment of a reconstructed conversation, the use of *But* (again sentence-initial) by the second speaker, should be interpreted not only at the semantic level (if this is possible), but rather on the pragmatic level: after the directive of the first speaker, the second speaker (=addressee) *protests* in order to mark that an essential condition is not satisfied, *viz.* that the addressee is *able* to perform the action meant in the directive. Compare also:

(3c) *A*: Can you tell me the time?

B: But, you have a watch yourself!

Again, the second speaker does not accept the request, but questions a condition for appropriate requests, *viz.* that one cannot perform a requested action oneself (*e.g.* provide information). Hence, one of the pragmatic functions of *but* in dialogues is to indicate that the speaker does not accept a previous speech act, *e.g.* by questioning one of its conditions. The contrastive meaning of *but* here pertains to action and not, as in semantic *but*, to denoted facts.

Utterance-initial *But* may be used in a not strictly connective way, *e.g.* to

express surprise, as in:

(3d) But, you had your hair cut!

In this case the speaker in a conversation will directly comment upon the situation, and again expectations seem to be involved. Weaker forms may be used as conversational starters, e.g. when a speaker tries to interrupt another speaker, even in those cases where no contradiction or semantic contrast is involved. These conversational properties of the use of *but* will not be investigated here.

Pragmatic *but* need not only link speech acts of different speakers. The same speaker may concatenate his speech acts by *but*, e.g. in order to mark the (non-) satisfaction of illocutionary conditions, or to emphasize that a previous speech act only holds under specific circumstances:

(3e) Yes, I'll buy you a mink coat. But, I must first ask my boss for a promotion.

We see here that the promise performed by the utterance of the first sentence may be 'qualified' by the condition asserted in the second sentence. Of course, the second speech act does not only 'restrict' the previous one, but at the same time semantic aspects are involved: the action denoted by the second sentence may be a condition for the (promised) action denoted by the first one. It is difficult to keep these two kinds of relationships apart.

3.5. Or

The use of pragmatic *or* is clearly different from that of semantic *or*. The latter requires that two facts are alternatives in two possible worlds (unknown to the speaker). Pragmatic *or* is typical in such examples as:

(4a) Do you want a sandwich? Or, aren't you hungry?

(4b) Give me a hand, will you. Or, don't you want it fixed?

(4c) Congratulations with your new car. Or, aren't you happy with it?

(4d) Don't you think Harry needs a vacation? Or, haven't you noticed how tired he looks these days?

(4e) Shut up! Or, don't you see I'm busy?

We see that pragmatic *or* typically introduces questions. In the examples given, the function of these questions is to check, make sure, correct, etc. conditions of a previous speech act of the same speaker. That is, a speaker may perform a request, an order, a promise, etc. but may at the same time wonder whether important conditions are satisfied for that act to be appropriate in that context. The next speech act, introduced with *Or*, then requires information (hence the fact that they are often questions) to check the necessary presuppositions. Of course, in many cases such a question may be only rhetorical, as in (4b), and in that case at the same

time may function again as a kind of explanation for the first speech act, as in (4e). Sometimes, this 'taking back' may have a politeness function, as in:

(4f) Could you lend me a hundred guilders? Or, are you short of cash yourself right now?

In this case, questioning a condition for a request at the same time provides the hearer with a possible excuse for not complying with the request. In other words, pragmatic connectives in conversation may have an important interaction-strategic function: speakers do not want to make mistakes or establish commitments for the hearer which may be undesired.

The disjunctive meaning of *or* is not completely absent in these pragmatic or conversational functions: a negative answer to the *or*-question would mean that the first speech act is cancelled. Instead of lack of knowledge about the relevant possible world -- as in semantic *or* -- we here have lack of knowledge about the relevant conditions in the communicative context. Resuming these various pragmatic features of *or* we may use the notion of 'ascertaining' to capture these pragmatic functions.

3.6. *So*

One of the best known pragmatic connectives is *So*. Its link with semantic *so*, denoting a consequence with respect to a cause or reason expressed in a previous clause or sentence, is obvious:

(5a) I was sick, so I stayed in bed.

Pragmatic *so* (often sentence-initial *So*) links two speech acts of which the second functions as 'conclusion' with respect to the first speech act. The pragmatic nature of this connective is based on the fact that 'drawing a conclusion' is taken to be an act. Clearly, this pragmatic function may be based on the semantic relation of cause-consequence. We have something similar in logical languages: on the one hand we have a conditional (e.g. strict implication) linking propositions, and on the other hand we have rules of inference defining valid proofs (derivability). Thus, if *p* implies *q*, then we may also say that if *p* is true, *q* may be derived from it.

Now, if we take the semantic example of (5a) as a comparison, we may construct examples where *So* rather has a pragmatic function:

(5b) John is sick. So, let's start.

Of course, indirectly, John's sickness and starting (e.g. a meeting) are also related as facts. Relevant here though is the link between the assertion, e.g. made by the chairperson of a meeting, and the *actual* properties of the communicative context, viz. the proposal to start the meeting. In other words, if certain information (in an

assertion) has been provided, the communicative context allows a speaker to perform a next speech act.

This way of marking conclusions with respect to the communicative context is also typical in conversations, where sentence- or turn-initial *So* indicates that the speaker draws a conclusion from the speech act performed by the previous speaker:

(5c) *A*: I am busy.

B: So, you are not coming tonight?

A: I'm sorry.

In this case the conclusion is closely linked to the underlying 'semantic' consequence relation between the fact of being busy and not coming. Conversationally, then, the next speaker states or (rhetorically or reproachfully) asks for the consequence which has not been drawn by the previous speaker. This conclusion, however, need not always pertain to denoted facts, but may also be drawn with respect to the previous speech act itself, and its conditions:

(5d) *A*: Give me that hammer!

B: So, you are in charge here?

In this example, *B*'s ironic conclusion reflects the usual condition that orders are issued by one who has the hierarchical position or right to issue orders.

3.7. *If*

Whereas semantic *so* denotes causally related facts in the actual world, *if* is a conditional which so to speak 'selects' the possible world or situation in which the consequent is asserted (or asked) to be true. Contrary to the usual logical analysis, both for material and strict implications, we take *if* . . . (*then*) to be a general *modal conditional*; that is, there is a conditional relation between facts, but at the same time the *if* indicates that the relation only holds in specific possible worlds (*viz.* those where the antecedent is true). In this sense *if*, as such, is rather a modal operator than a connective. This analysis, the descriptive and formal details of which will be omitted here, is also relevant for our understanding of the pragmatic functions of *if*:

(6a) *If* you're hungry. There is some ham in the fridge.

(6b) Take that one. *If* you want my advice.

(6c) You look fine. *If* I may say so.

The usual, classical (logical) analysis of *if* would not be able to account for this kind of examples. The first example, (6a) is perhaps closest to the semantic use of *if*. That is, if we take the second sentence as an indirect permission ('You may take . . .') the first sentence establishes the situation in which such a permission

would be relevant ('In case you are hungry'). In that reading, pragmatic *if* is a typical conditional for speech acts: it specifies the conditions – of a context unknown to the speaker – under which a speech act should count.

The other examples are somewhat different. The respective advice and compliment, performed by the use of the first sentences of (6b) and (6c), respectively, have a number of conditions, which are checked, 'after the act', by the speaker. Just as for pragmatic *or* the speaker is ascertaining himself of the appropriateness of the speech act. This time, not by asking for a (negated) condition, but by a polite or rhetorical, conditional question. In other words, the following *if*-speech act indicates the condition under which the first counts. In fact, this conditional may hold on the meta-level: the speaker explicitly questions whether a given speech act was appropriate. The usual link between *if*-conditional and disjunction + negation ($p > q \equiv \vee \sim q$) often also holds at the pragmatic level: the examples given may also be paraphrased by *or* plus negation (. . . Or, aren't you hungry?). Yet, conversationally, there are important differences: *if* in these cases is clearly more polite than *Or + NEG*, which may even have a downright aggressive or reproachful meaning. Note, incidentally, that this link between the conditional and negated disjunction does not mean that all cases where pragmatic *or* or *if* are used can be mutually paraphrased. In fact, most of the examples (4) cannot simply be translated into an *if*-structure.

A variant of this pragmatic *if*, viz. *if + NEG*, is expressed by *unless*:

(7a) Don't go into the park at night. Unless, you want to get mugged.

(7b) I'll bring you the records. Unless, I don't get them in time from Pete.

Both examples closely follow the underlying semantic conditional: *p unless q = if not q, then p*. Pragmatically, however, the additional feature is that the advice given in (7a) is stated, at least rhetorically, to hold only under specific conditions (if you do *not* want to get mugged). Similarly, the promise in (7b) is restricted to a situation in which some condition is satisfied (viz. that I get the records in time myself). From the fact that the second speech act of (7a) can be paraphrased by 'Or do you want to get mugged?' we again see that pragmatic *or*, *if* and *unless* are closely related. In all cases they pertain to the – often rhetorical, and/or polite – questioning of appropriateness conditions (or sometimes semantic conditions) of a neighboring, mostly preceding, speech act.

4. Conclusions

The list of pragmatic connectives discussed, very briefly and informally, above is not complete. Nor did we try to capture all possible meaning features of their uses in different pragmatic and conversational contexts. At many points it appeared that a general semantic meaning (a certain relation between facts) is specified at the

pragmatic level (a similar relation between speech acts), or that factual conditions are specified for the appropriateness of a next speech act. As may be expected, most of the pragmatic connectives may be assigned a function in terms of the satisfaction of conditions for preceding or following speech acts: a speaker will add, check, question, attack, *etc.* one of these conditions, or even the speech act as a whole. Variations may be stylistic, rhetorical and conversational: some forms will be more polite, more aggressive, *etc.* than others, *etc.* Structurally speaking, finally, there is a main, superordinate, speech act, which is modified by the subordinate speech act introduced by a pragmatic connective. Future research will have to focus on the further textual or conversational details of the strategies determining the use of the various pragmatic connectives.

Reference note

Instead of burdening this short paper with many relevant references, the reader is requested to consult my *Text and context* (London: Longmans, 1977) for further references on connectives and the various semantic and pragmatic notions used in this paper. Further observations on pragmatic connectives – and the general framework of discourse pragmatics – may also be found in the papers collected in my *Studies in the pragmatics of discourse* (The Hague, Mouton, in press). For this version of the paper, which is close to the original in other respects, I have benefitted from Dorothea Franck's thesis *Grammatik und Konversation* (University of Amsterdam, 1979), especially regarding the conversational aspects of the use of connectives (which she assesses for German modal particles, which are another form of pragmatic 'connectives').

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