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Book review

How to express yourself with a causal connective: Subjectivity and causal connectives in Dutch, German and French
Mirna Pit, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2003, 360 pp., €70

The title of this book clearly places it within the field of discourse-analytic studies. On the other hand, its subtitle orients towards a cognitive linguistic account, as the issue of subjectivity has of late (after metaphor) acquired a very prominent position in research in the field. As the focus within cognitive linguistics has been, however, on lexical semantics and analysis of single sentences rather than larger units of discourse, the reader is interposed between two purportedly irreconcilable approaches. But as Knot et al. (2001: 197) have noted, "at the discourse level, the dividing line between cognitive linguistic approaches and traditional approaches seems less clear-cut than at the sentence level"; moreover, "for research on discourse structure, there is considerable scope for the integration of work in cognitive linguistics with that from other traditions within linguistics" (ibid: 198), as both Dutchphone and Anglophone research in relational coherence has shown.

Mirna Pit's (MP) book is most welcome as it is one of few book-length studies on causal connectives in Dutch, German and French, let alone English, where the absence of comprehensive studies of causal connectives is more than noticeable despite the vast philosophical and other literature on causality (but see Breul, 1997, to which reference is missing; Degand, 1996; Lagerwerf, 1998). As such, it provides a rather comprehensive and very useful review of the field, even if limited within a cognitive linguistics framework and its predilections—no mention of a neo-Gricean or a relevance-theoretic framework and studies of this orientation (cf. Myer, 2001). The languages of the title display a variety of linguistic forms for subordinating causal connectives equivalent to the English *because*: in Dutch *omdat*, *want*, *aangezien*, and *doordat*; in German *weil*, *denn* and *da*; in French *parce que*, *car* and *puisque*. If we accept that there cannot be real synonymy and that there must be differentiating nuances of meaning or function of these connectives, the question that immediately arises concerns the correlates that determine their use and those subtle differences of meaning. The book sets out to provide an answer to this question.

Firmly rooted within cognitive linguistics MP's study bears the hallmarks of the rather recent tradition in the field: an implicit rejection of a correspondence model of language and veridicality, and an interest in the human factor and notions such as subjectivity and perspective, traced back in Nietzsche's perspectivism (see Hales and Welshon, 2000), as an

alternative to absolutism that recurs in science, philosophy and religion, but also in philosophy of language and semantics emerging from those quarters (what has been called 'objectivism' in cognitive linguistics circles).

The two axes, therefore, along which the book evolves and revolves are those of subjectivity and causality, the former analyzed primarily as perspective. While the concepts of subjectivity and perspective are sufficiently discussed, that of causality is taken for granted as a notion used to label cognitive representations of instances of causation, and questions concerning its nature seem to exceed the aspirations of the present study; instead, the author sets out to give ''a cognitively plausible account of the meaning of connectives based on verifiable and replicable research methods applied to actual occurrences of connectives in context'' (p. 14). Even so, the reader should not expect a comprehensive account of all the uses of causal connectives examined, as MP's focus is on the backward use of connectives and her examples are all drawn from written texts—maybe this is why the author is not interested in Schiffrin's (1987) seminal work.

The book consists of six chapters; following an introduction and a review of the literature, Chapter 3 presents a series of accounts of subjectivity aiming at a conceptually coherent synthesis, while Chapter 4 is dedicated to an empirical testing on Dutch backward causal connectives of the account of subjectivity developed in the previous chapter. Chapter 5 is a cross-linguistic study, whereas in Chapter 6 the author reviews connectives and meanings.

Using the notions of perspective and subjectivity to explain subtle variations in the use of causal connectives is not a novelty in the field. The question is whether MP succeeds in integrating the concepts into a conceptually coherent framework, which will adequately explain recalcitrant uses of causal connectives that cannot be 'tamed' into neat categorizations or domains of existing theories. While linguistically based, subjectivity surely aspires to reflect conceptually grounded issues relating to the manifestation of the subject of speaking (or writing). In fact, even if the link is not made explicit in the literature, subjectivity is the underside of consciousness, because, as Searle (1997: 120) writes, ''consciousness has a first-person or subjective ontology.'' Subjectivity then points to conscious states as experienced by a subject and communicated from the first-point of view of that subject. Apparently, this is what Langacker (1985, 1990) tried to capture in linguistic terms in advancing a theory of subjectivity. MP bases her approach to subjectivity primarily on Langacker's account.

She distinguishes between two types of subjectivity: (a) 'speaker foregrounding' subjectivity arising from the speaker's foregrounding of ''one or more aspects of himself [sic] in the utterance'' (p. 89), and (b) 'perspective' subjectivity concerning other participants' subjectivities rather than the speaker's, as adopted in the utterance in varying degrees. These two types of subjectivity are compatible and interrelated. But as she mentions problems in Langacker's account of subjectivity, identified by John Haiman, she proposes to also use the notion of speaker involvement as a better expression of speaker subjectivity, which, however, is not further discussed. MP's problem is to find ways to identify and measure, so to speak, the perspective of participants or characters of the textual world created. She, therefore, sets out to explore various theories equating perspective with subjectivity and locating it in direct, indirect and free indirect speech, referential choice, role and nature of participants, implicit/explicit textual marking, tense, etc. Still, more

accounts based on deictic shift theory and Fauconnier's mental spaces are presented in MP's theory-pecking course enabling her to conclude that ''narrator's subjectivity and character's subjectivity are communicating vessels; the higher the degree of character's subjectivity, the lower the degree of narrator's subjectivity and vice versa'' (p. 102).

On the other hand, the mechanism for determining the locus of the causal relation, and hence the bearer of subjectivity (whose perspective may be inscribed in the causal structure), is afforded by Talmy's (1988) account. Viewing causal relations along Talmy's force dynamic lines, MP is enabled to identify a main participant in each causal structure. This is designated the causally primary participant (p) and is the bearer of lesser or greater subjectivity that ultimately, she will argue, determines the use of connectives. She sets up a hypothesis, according to which: ''The distribution of background causal connectives in Dutch can be explained in terms of the subjectivity of the causally primary participant [cp] of the causal relation. That is, the cp's degree of subjectivity best predicts the choice for one connective or another'' (p. 115).

She further elaborates on the cp's subjectivity and defines it, in order to make it 'measurable', along a number of variables identified previously, such as, the cp's role (evaluator, speech act performer, agent or non-agent), the nature of the cp (sentient or not), the mode of representation of the cp (actual speaker's discourse, representation mode, referential choice, etc.), these being the most important ones. Explicit marking overall makes the cp more visible (even if the conceptualization becomes more subjective) and more objective, thus reducing the degree of its subjectivity, so that pronominal reference as in *She hopes that the weather will be fine, because she has a day off* is marked more subjective than when the pronominal ''she'' is replaced by a nominal. But this correlate, one might object, disregards, or appears to overrule, other constraints governing reference assignment in discourse. What is at the core of this notion of subjectivity (as developed primarily by Langacker and borrowed by MP) is the deictic center as a mental model of spatial, temporal and character information as generated by the speaker. Finally, she arrives at a definition of subjectivity: "Subjectivity equals self-expression. Subjectivity of some participant P arises (a) if his [sic] perspective is adopted (P = conceptualizer), and (b) if P, being perspectivized, becomes part of the meaning of the utterance (that is, if his consciousness is a reference-point in the interpretation of the linguistic expression). Subjectivity is a matter of degree" (p. 108).

In Chapter 4, MP puts her account to the test, measuring each time the most central variables posited in her theory: role, nature, representation mode and explicit/implicit marking. Her proposal correctly predicts the uses of the Dutch causal connectives: *omdat* has more subjective cp's than *doordat* and less subjective cp's than *want* and *aangezien*. In Chapter 5, she tests her prediction for French that ''on average'' the cp's degree of subjectivity of *parce que* is lower than that of *car* and *puisque* and for German that ''in relations with *weil* the cp's average degree of subjectivity is lower than that in relations with *denn* and *da*'' (p. 239). Both predictions are empirically tested and validated in broad terms by corpus analyses. A lurking question, however, might be whether these variables should not be viewed, measured and explained in interrelated configurations and in broader discursive terms. But one has to acknowledge the inherent difficulty of such an enterprise, and appreciate the corpus analysis carried out in this study, which, indeed, must have been a formidable task.

A real problem concerns the identification of the cp in each causal construction. We are left to rely on intuition, but intuition is in its turn based on representing a situation by way of understanding the meaning of the causal relation amongst other things. It appears therefore, that it is not always clear who the cp is. For example, in (1):

(1)   She does not understand why he went home so early, because he has a day off tomorrow. [cp = she]

MP claims that the cp is "she" rather than "he", because "she" is the locus of effect of causality. She states that "we could argue that the cp's self is foregrounded if his self is part of the causality expressed" (p. 116). But this is turning the principle on its head, because one needs to explicate the causal relation before identifying the cp. For example, if (1) were (1a),

(1a)   She does not understand why he went home so early because he has an exam tomorrow.

clearly, the scope of the connective does not range beyond the embedded clause:

[She does not understand [why he went home so early because he has an exam tomorrow.]]

interpreted as

[She does not understand [why he should go home so early just because he has an exam tomorrow.]]

So it appears that there is no independent procedure to identify the cp since this often presupposes an interpretation of the connective and its range of function. And one reading or another of a causal sentence is often dependent on causal chains as determined by our background knowledge—an assumption not made in the study. This problem is more acute in languages with one form for the causal connective as in English. The same is true of examples such as (2):

(2)   Presumably, she is pregnant, because she didn't drink a single glass of wine. [cp = actual speaker]

when *presumably*, the subjectivity marker, is left out as in (2a) (my example):

(2a)   She is pregnant, because she didn't drink a single glass of wine.

In fact, the type of connective depends on the type of causal relation, which, in its turn, taps into background knowledge feeding causal reasoning; (2) would still be a subjectively marked causal relation even in the absence of *presumably* as in (2a), because one cannot supply a direct causal link between drinking or not drinking wine and becoming pregnant, while one can in (2b) (my example):

(2b)   She's pregnant because she had unprotected sex.

While (2a) and (2b) may license more or less subjective connectives, my guess is that only (2b) will allow the more objective *omdat*. At least in Modern Greek, where there are

roughly three distinct linguistic forms for *because*, only (2b) would allow (apparently) the equivalent of *omdat*, while this connective would not be an option for (2) or (2a) (see Kitis, in press).

But even lexical items, such as polarity items in otherwise identically phrased causal sentences, can affect the locus of the cp: *He didn't speak because he was moved* is ambiguous since negation can take scope over the *because*-clause and the cp would then be "he"; on the other hand, *He didn't say a thing, because he was moved* cannot be ambiguous since the cp can only be the speaker. MP's account cannot treat this issue.

The author also claims that there seems to be a correlation between syntactically highly integrated relations of clauses and a high degree of objectivity. In cases where the resulting effect is presupposed, she claims, it is in fact backgrounded and can be considered as an act of objectification as in *He probably went home because his child is ill*. Such instances call for *omdat*, which is a genuinely subordinating causal connective (pp. 158–160), though this correlation was not supported for German. However, it is doubtful that this explanation is satisfactory, and that MP does not miss out on what really the case is: all these 'integrated' cases appear to reflect an equally integrated relationship between causes and effects, or a close or direct connection between the propositions of the two clauses as providing causal relations. It seems that the idea of objectivity is owed to this direct or integrated conceptual relation in the causal situation sustained by our stereotyped background knowledge. Syntactic correlates, such as intonation, pauses, etc., are epiphenomena rather than the real source of connection or coherence, as such factors cannot of their own accord predict the type of connective.

As MP claims, this account of subjectivity disposes of discrete boundaries between a domain of use theory, offering instead a scalar conception of subjectivity. This is a real bonus, as the domain of use approach has been shown to be inadequate to explain many real data, but also instances of epistemic and speech act uses, when the epistemic or speech act verb is encoded thus licensing 'objectivity' connectives (Kitis, in press). MP's scalar model of subjectivity, indeed, seems to offer a viable explanation of the use of causal connectives in line with the degree of visibility of the bearer of subjectivity. For example, in (3):

(3)   John loved her, because he came back.

the speaker, who is the locus of the causal relation, is totally absent from a linguistic manifestation and, consequently, (3) is maximally subjective, licensing in Dutch *want* rather than *omdat*.

However, this account still falls short of explaining satisfactorily why in (4),

(4)   John came back because he loved her.

omdat is allowed in Dutch, since the speaker is as invisible as in (3) and, hence, one is justified in judging it as subjective as (3). But this is not the case, which means that there is something else at play that MP's theory cannot capture. Pit will reply that the locus of causality in (4) is not the speaker but rather "John", who is the cp, but there are no independent grounds enabling us to make this claim. As for structural correlates, such as the absence of a pause or a comma in written language, they are not reliable since even in

their absence (3) will still be judged as being the speaker's/author's claim, while in (4) the speaker/author is not encrypted in the text. In other words, what are the determinants for a subject's encryption in an utterance? As I have claimed elsewhere, resolving the issue seems to lead us to the type of the causal relation itself. MP does refer to 'type of causality', but restricts it to the cp's role as evaluator, agent, etc. (p. 168).

MP's claim that her findings (drawn on the basis of written language) ''should in principle also be valid for spoken data'' (p. 320) does not sound convincing as (causal) connectives (or discourse markers) have also been shown to contribute in various ways to the organization of conversation (Ford, 1993; Kitis, 1987; Schiffrin, 1987, amongst others). MP does not touch on this issue.

Minor stylistic infelicities, e.g., a repeated curious use of 'opposite', do not disrupt a very good presentation; on the other hand, more than a score of typos could have been avoided with more careful editing, as would wrong or missing references. Also her unperturbed persistent use of the generic 'he' (without a note in the preface to pre-empt the reader's unease) can be even annoying; while a name index is very useful, a subject index would also have been a definite bonus.

This book is a must for scholars who work in the field of connectives, coherence relations, discourse analysis, cross-linguistic studies and corpus linguistics, not only because it offers a comprehensive review and discussion of the research in the field of causal connectives in the languages examined, or because it offers a most welcome corpus analysis, but mainly because her proposal is a convincing alternative to the one offered along the domains of use line of research (Sweetser, 1990) and others that also use notions of subjectivity and/or perspective. MP's concept of perspective and subjectivity is sufficiently fine-grained, even if the reader at some points may feel that s/he is ploughing through a mish-mash of mini accounts on subjectivity and perspective. Finally, Mirna Pit manages to stay afloat and synthesize a variety of accounts into an operational framework that serves her purposes. The bottom line is that her theory, not only presents a more satisfactory alternative to the classic 'domains' analysis of connectives, but has also been empirically validated. The scalar concept integrated in the theory enables her to better account for a wide range of uses of causal connectives and to also accommodate uses that resisted categorization in other frameworks. The fact that there are still problems challenging her account does not diminish its operational value.

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