

## Presentation

This issue of *Argumentation* is devoted to the relation between argumentative aspects of natural language, discourse structure and inferential process. The authors belong, institutionally or informally, to a research group of the *Unité de linguistique française* at the University of Geneva. The researches made in this *Unité* from the beginning of eighties have been concentrated mainly around the pragmatic description of French markers — as pragmatic connectives, modal adverbs, illocutionary verbs — within a general model of discourse structure (cf. CLF 1, ELA 44, Roulet et alii 1985, Moeschler 1982 and 1985, and more recently Egner 1988 and Auchlin forthcoming for applications to non-indo-european languages). These studies' main goal is to propose a description of the linguistic aspects of argumentative devices in natural language in relation to a general conception of discourse organisation. In other words, the linguistic description of argumentative items has been connected to their structural functions in discourse process.

Broadly speaking, three main aspects of discourse organisation have been developed: (1) the hierarchical and functional structure of discourse, (2) the sequencing principles or rules governing discourse production, and (3) the interpretive rules governing the connection of utterances in discourse. The starting point for such a project has been **speech acts theory**, which allowed a first hypothesis on discourse structure and interpretation: that is, a sequence of contributions in face to face interaction is governed at the level of exchange structure by the allocation of an illocutionary function to each move. At the level of move structure, a second hypothesis about its structural organisation has introduced the argumentative properties of the connected utterances, which can be exhibited by the presence of pragmatic connectives used in sequencing and by the possibility of reconstructing an argumentative level of discourse organisation. More recently, a third hypothesis on the interpretive side has been stated which integrates the inferential ties between discursive information and contextual information necessary for interpretation.

The focus on these aspects of discourse explains the reference to two main frameworks in pragmatics: on the one hand, **argumentation theory**, as developed by Anscombe and Ducrot (see Anscombe and Ducrot 1983), and on the other, **relevance theory** by Sperber and Wilson (see Sperber and Wilson 1986). In other words, argumentation theory centers linguistic description on argumentative particles at linguistic and discursive levels, and relevance theory imposes a more general inside look on the cognitive aspect of utterance production and interpretation in discourse. All the papers of this issue present thus general questions and proposals concerning the argumentative and/or inferential aspect of discourse (see

Roulet, Egner and Moeschler) and the linguistic and/or contextual aspects of utterances production and interpretation (Reboul and Jayez).

E. Roulet's paper (*Des dimensions argumentatives du récit et de la description dans le discours*) is the first attempt to give a description of narrative and descriptive discourses integrated within a general model of discourse structure, based on hierarchical and argumentative principles. Namely, his proposal starts from the analogy in narrative and descriptive sequences between the reactive or argumentative function of the sequence, allowing a distinction between *récit* and *relation* on the one hand, and between *description* and "*description*" on the other.

I. Egner's contribution (*The role of topos in the use of a wobe particle*) is completely devoted to the pragmatic description of a modal particle in an African language (*wobe*), and shows how argumentative principles like *topoi* (in Ducrot's argumentation theory) are connected to linguistic expressions, and how contextual assumptions work out these principles. Furthermore, her description gives as output proposals for the explanation of how an illocution can be derived, that is, how the hearer is unable to interpret a move as a demand for information or a demand for explanation whether the invoked *topos* is validated or invalidated by the contextual assumptions.

A. Reboul's paper (*Relevance and argumentation: how bald can you get?*) is about the use of scalar and absolute predicate (like *bald* and *dead* respectively) in relation to famous logical paradoxes (the baldness paradox and the sorite paradox). The solution proposed to these logico-semantic problems is pragmatic, based on the distinction between the precise definition of a concept and its vagueness in use. Her description is furthermore related to a more general problem raised in semantic theory concerning the description of non-referential (or non-classifying) expressions and argumentative predicates, expressions which can be described in the same terms as scalar and absolute predicates.

J. Jayez's contribution (*Problems of context and knowledge*) is a general and useful survey of the standard and more recent proposals for the definition of context for interpretation, either in lexical semantics, argumentative theory, prototype semantics, artificial intelligence and non-classical logic. The problems of what is knowledge for understanding utterances, what is required in order to draw inferences are discussed, with an inside look in argumentation problems raised by the occurrence of pragmatic connectives (see for instance the notions of *semantic scenarios*, *derivation* and *guidance* for pragmatic inferences connected to pragmatic items).

Finally, J. Moeschler's paper (*Pragmatic connectives, argumentative coherence and relevance*) is an attempt to deal with the argumentative and discursive properties of pragmatic connectives within a cognitive and inferential approach of discourse understanding, which focuses on the

instruction for context formation raised by linguistic items. His proposal is to relate a conventionalist approach for semantic description of linguistic markers and a procedural model for discourse understanding, which emphasises relevance access as opposed to coherence reconstruction in understanding.

The topics of these contributions are at first sight disconnected. But it appears that all papers contribute to answer to general problems raised in pragmatic theory and discourse analyses. What is it that depends on the linguistic system on the one hand and on the context on the other in the interpretation of utterance and in argumentation formation? What does belong to linguistic and argumentative devices in the production and the interpretation of discourse sequences? I hope that certain proposals here will enlighten the reader and give a positive contribution to these problems.

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