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Book Review / Рецензия

Review of Sandrine Zufferey and Liesbeth Degand. 2024.
***Connectives and Discourse Relations*. Cambridge:**
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Sandrine Zufferey and Liesbeth Degand's *Connectives and Discourse Relations* (2024) is an insightful and comprehensive examination of the role of connectives in structuring discourse across different languages and genres. The book offers a well-balanced integration of theoretical perspectives and empirical research, making it a valuable resource for scholars in linguistics, cognitive science, and language acquisition. The authors provide a detailed analysis of discourse relations, their explicit and implicit markers, and their cognitive processing. With a broad comparative approach, the book explores cross-linguistic variations and the acquisition of connectives in both first and second languages.

The book consists of nine chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the main concepts of the book, namely the notions of discourse relations and connectives and situates them within the more general concepts of discourse cohesion and coherence. Chapter 2 presents the main characteristics of four leading models for discourse annotation. Chapter 3 explores the interface between semantics and pragmatics and analyzes the type of meaning conveyed by connectives. In Chapter 4, the authors study the interface between syntax and discourse in order to investigate the role of syntax in the use of connectives. The authors address the question if the grammatical category of a connective has an influence on its meanings and uses. In chapter 5 an overview of the way discourse connectives emerge in language over time is given with a focus on the diachronically well-documented languages French, Italian and English. The



final chapters focus on the developmental aspects of connectives, examining how children and second-language learners acquire discourse markers. The book traces the developmental trajectory of connectives in first-language acquisition, showing that children first acquire basic connectives (e.g., and, because) before mastering more complex ones (e.g., although, however).

For second-language learners, the book explores factors influencing connective mastery, such as negative transfer from the first language and differences in syntactic structures. The discussion on pedagogical approaches is particularly useful for language educators, offering insights into teaching strategies that can help learners including children with impairments use connectives more effectively.

No doubt languages possess a repertoire of connectives and other discourse-pragmatic markers to express discourse relations (e.g. Gritsenko & Kamou 2024, Heine et al. 2021, 2024, Kurtul 2012, Traugott 2022, Victorova 2014, among many others). The definition of connectives can vary depending on the goal of the research and its domain. Zufferey and Degand point out that connectives do not only differ between languages. They are also used quite differently across different genres within the same language. These differences are particularly evident between spoken and written genres. The authors argue that discourse is structured and coherent due to logical connections between sentences. Discourse relations define these links, such as causality, temporality, and contrast, while connectives explicitly mark them. However, relations can also be inferred without explicit connectives. Cohesion and coherence are distinct but related: cohesion refers to linguistic devices that create texture, while coherence is the cognitive perception of logical continuity. Cohesion includes reference, substitution, ellipsis, and discourse markers, with connectives forming a key subcategory.

The book provides a solid foundation in the study of discourse relations by exploring various theoretical frameworks. It introduces key models such as Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), Segmented Discourse Representation Theory (SDRT), the Penn Discourse Treebank (PDTB), and the Cognitive Coherence Relations (CCR) Model. Each framework is analyzed in detail, highlighting its strengths and limitations, particularly concerning explicit versus implicit relations and cross-linguistic applicability.

One of the book's strengths is its comparative approach, which allows readers to appreciate the diversity of theoretical perspectives on discourse coherence. RST, for instance, emphasizes hierarchical structures, while SDRT incorporates inferential processes. PDTB takes a data-driven approach, focusing on lexically grounded relations. The CCR model, in contrast, explains relations through cognitive primitives. By juxtaposing these models, the authors provide a nuanced understanding of how different perspectives shape the study of discourse relations.

A central focus of the book is the role of connectives in signaling discourse relations. Zufferey and Degand categorize connectives based on their grammatical functions, semantic properties, and discourse-pragmatic roles. The discussion

covers coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *but*), subordinating conjunctions (e.g., *because*, *although*), adverbs (e.g., *therefore*, *however*), and prepositions (e.g., *before*, *after*).

The book provides an excellent analysis of polysemy and polyfunctionality in connectives, showing how the same connective can signal different relations depending on context. This aspect is particularly valuable for scholars interested in discourse ambiguity and pragmatic inference. The authors also explore how different languages express discourse relations using varying syntactic and lexical means, offering cross-linguistic comparisons that enhance the book's global relevance. They highlight two perspectives which help analyze connectives: (1) Semasiological approach: Examines the multiple functions of a single connective; (2) Onomasiological approach: Studies different connectives that can express the same discourse relation. Understanding the syntactic positioning and morphosyntactic properties of connectives helps clarify their disambiguation and usage across contexts.

The book moves beyond linguistic description to examine how discourse relations and connectives are processed cognitively. Experimental studies reviewed in the book reveal that explicit connectives facilitate reading comprehension, recall, and discourse segmentation. The discussion on individual differences in processing—such as working memory capacity and linguistic proficiency—is particularly illuminating.

One of the book's strongest contributions is its discussion on the implicit versus explicit marking of discourse relations. The authors present evidence from psycholinguistic studies showing that while connectives aid comprehension, speakers and writers often omit them, relying on readers' inferential abilities. This discussion bridges linguistic theory and cognitive science, demonstrating the interplay between language use and cognitive processing.

While the book covers a vast range of topics, expanding discussions on digital communication would further enhance its contributions. Given the increasing reliance on online discourse, a discussion on how digital texts (e.g., tweets, instant messages) influence the use and interpretation of connectives would have been a timely addition. Moreover, it could have explored how the use of connectives changes across different discourse communities. Academic discourse, political speech, journalistic writing, and casual conversation all employ discourse connectives in unique ways, and an analysis of these differences could provide practical applications for researchers and educators in communication studies. Another potential expansion could have been a deeper focus on bilingual and multilingual processing of discourse connectives. The book briefly discusses second-language acquisition but does not fully explore how bilinguals process and switch between connectives in their different languages. Research on code-switching and cross-linguistic influence in discourse coherence could add an important dimension to this field.

Nevertheless, Zufferey and Degand's *Connectives and Discourse Relations* is a well-researched and highly informative contribution to the study of discourse coherence. Its integration of theoretical models, empirical findings, and cross-linguistic analyses makes it an essential read for linguists, educators, and cognitive scientists. It constitutes an indispensable resource for those interested in the intricate relationship between language structure, cognitive processing, and discourse interpretation. Future research building on this work could explore emerging trends in computational linguistics and sociolinguistics, offering further insights into how discourse relations shape communication in evolving linguistic landscapes.

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