



Causal relations between discourse and grammar. A contrastive perspective

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In this talk, I will propose an analysis of causal relations on three distinct levels of analysis: syntax, semantics and discourse (following Blühndorn 2008). The question raised concerns the assumed correlation between syntactic relations of coordination and subordination, and coherence relations at the discourse level. The hypothesis is that the processing of causal relations in discourse is constrained by the affordances of the grammar (cf. Du Bois 2003). This will be illustrated on the basis of two case studies: (i) the paratactic (V2-order) use of the Dutch subordinating conjunction *omdat* ('because'); and (ii) the "macrosyntactic" use of the French subordinating conjunction *parce que* ('because') (Debaisieux 2016). My claim is that the a)-variants (syntactically dependent) are processed differently from the b)-variants (syntactically non-dependent) of examples (1-2):

- (1) a. *ouais ils ont s se sont foutus de ma gueule tout le trajet // parce qu'elle était garée super loin ///*
(LOCAS-F, conv-i_1_loc1)
'yeah they made fun of me during the whole walk PARCE QUE it [the car] was parked super far away'
- b. *euuh je pense que // il n' y a aucune raison // de /// de s'exprimer // d'une manière euuh compliquée // parce que on écrit de la poésie ///*
(LOCAS-F, intrad_1_L2)
'uh I believe that there is no reason to express oneself in a complicated manner PARCE QUE one writes poetry'
- (2) a. *'s avonds willen ze geen bussen meer laten rijden. omdat die amper bezet zijn.* (CGN, fn000795)
'In the evening they don't want any busses anymore OMDAT they are barely occupied.'
- b. *ik uhm tussen de middag moesten we mijn zus en ik altijd bij mijn oma eten. omdat oma woonde alleen en mijn moeder vond dat zielig dus wij moesten dat oplossen* (CGN, fn000634)
'at noon my sister and I had to have our lunch with Granny OMDAT Granny lived alone and my mother thought that was sad so we had to fix that.'

The syntactically dependent uses of *omdat/parce que* occur in different discourse patterns than syntactically non-dependent uses. Evidence comes from prosodic, referential and disfluency analyses, thus demonstrating a different production process. How this affects the comprehension process is an open question.

In sum, discourse comes with the affordances the grammar gives us. As speakers, we may stretch these grammatical "rules" and bend them to new uses in discourse. In the linguistic system, this will lead to new grammatical conventions. In cognition, this should come with different production and comprehension processes.

References

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