Romance Linguistics
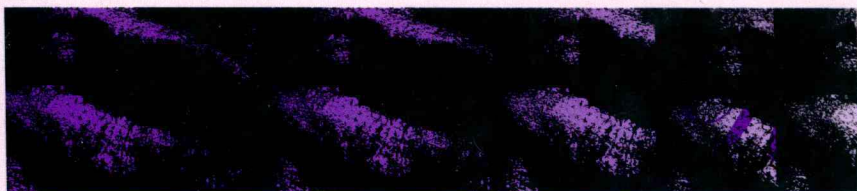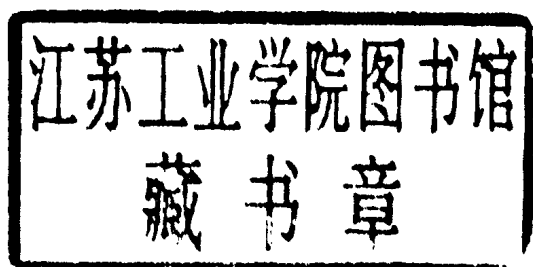
DISCOURSE PRAGMATICS AND THE VERB

Edited by

SUZANNE FLEISCHMAN
AND LINDA R. WAUGH

Discourse-Pragmatics and the Verb

The Evidence from Romance

Edited by Suzanne Fleischman and Linda R. Waugh

ROUTLEDGE

London and New York

Discourse-Pragmatics
and the Verb

Other books in the Romance Linguistics series include:

Structures and Transformations
Christopher J. Pountain

Studies in the Romance Verb
eds Nigel Vincent and Martin Harris

Weakening Processes in the History of Spanish Consonants
Raymond Harris-Northall

Spanish Word Formation
M.F. Lang

Tense and Text
Dulcie Engel

Variation and Change in French
John Green and Wendy Ayres-Bennett

Latin Syntax and Semantics
Harm Pinkster

Thematic Theory in Syntax
Robin Clark

Tense and Narrativity
Suzanne Fleischman

Comparative Constructions in Spanish and French Syntax
Susan Price

Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages
Roger White

Interactive Morphonology: Metaphony in Italy
Martin Maiden

Also of interest:

The Romance Languages
Martin Harris and Nigel Vincent

Contributors

Paola Bentivoglio Universidad Central de Venezuela, Cáracas, Venezuela.

Giulia Centineo Cowell College, University of California at Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, California.

Thomas D. Cravens Department of French and Italian, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin.

Suzanne Fleischman Department of French, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California.

Jorge M. Guitart Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.

Flora Klein-Andreu Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York.

Béatrice Lamiroy Departement Linguistiek, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Leuven, Belgium.

Patricia V. Lunn Department of Romance and Classical Languages, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.

Monique Monville-Burston Department of French, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Pierre Swiggers Departement Linguistiek, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Leuven, Belgium.

Co Vet Instituut voor Romaanse Talen, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands.

Linda R. Waugh Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

Elizabeth G. Weber Neuropsychiatric Institute, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

Contents

1   Introduction

Suzanne Fleischman and Linda R. Waugh

Over the last two decades a growing number of linguists have come to acknowledge the need to look at various linguistic phenomena, particularly morphological and syntactic phenomena, from the viewpoint of their functional motivation in actual human communication, in real discourses and texts – in preference, that is, to concentrating exclusively on the formal algorithmic properties of syntax, and considering in isolation often implausible sentences that can be contextualized only with great difficulty. In particular, there is increasing recognition that whatever intrinsic meaning grammatical categories may have, pragmatic factors and discourse context play a crucial role in the interpretation of their meaning. We understand pragmatics here, as most linguists and philosophers of language do, to refer to the use of language in actual contexts of communication, that is to the ways in which speakers – or writers – manipulate the resources of their language to accomplish particular communicative objectives. This view of discourse-pragmatics subsumes a variety of different notions having to do with structuring information (e.g. the encoding of topic-focus relations, foreground-background, assertion, and presupposition), creating textual cohesion and connectivity, establishing discoursal point of view, expressing speaker attitudes in discourse, and conveying information pertinent to the relations between speech-act participants and the text. Such a view implies, then, that grammatical categories, properties of the text, and characteristics of the context (in particular the speech-act context) are inextricably interwoven, and thus collectively provide the appropriate foundation for a general and explanatory functional analysis of the categories in question.

Grammatical categories associated with the verb, such as tense, aspect, mood, or voice, have served as an important arena for demonstrating the relevance of discourse-pragmatic approaches to grammar (see, for example, the pertinent contributions in Givón 1979; Hopper

1982; Hopper and Thompson 1982; Klein-Andreu 1983.) Though the Romance languages have been a significant testing ground (e.g. as evidenced in several papers in Vincent and Harris 1982), they have also been used to demonstrate more formal approaches to categories of the verb (see the Romance-based studies in Tedeschi and Zaenen 1981 and Lo Cascio and Vet 1986). The present volume is intended as a further contribution to the ongoing dialogue on the verb and its grammar, and one which seeks specifically to underscore, with reference to the major Romance languages (French, Spanish, Italian), the extent to which discourse-pragmatic considerations are crucial in the process of our coming to understand the work that verbal categories do in actual language use, work that clearly transcends what we normally think of as their basic grammatical functions.

The studies in this volume have been grouped according to their focus – in terms of the particular verbal category they treat and the language(s) at issue.

The first four chapters each deal with questions involving the interpretation of tense-aspect categories in relation to their discourse-pragmatic contextualization.

Co Vet examines problems in the interpretation of texts involving the perfective (*passé simple*) and imperfective (*imparfait*) past tenses in French. He argues that an analysis of tense which makes use of the notions of "setting" (a period in the past or an object or event located therein which functions to provide temporal reference), "change" (of setting), and "perspective" (consideration of the point of view from which the setting or change of setting is perceived), is capable of solving certain problems that cannot be resolved by positing an anaphoric relation between sentences in which the perfective and imperfective occur. Analyses of the latter type assume that sentences in the simple past introduce temporal antecedents or a temporal reference point for states of affairs reported by sentences in the imperfect. Vet shows that the "overt" tense markers and adverbials of a text must be supplemented by information conveyed by the *Aktionsart* of the sentence and/or by purely pragmatic factors. His analysis also provides a fine-grained semantic base for research on the discourse functions of tense/aspect which posits a continuum from foreground to background.

The next two chapters, by Suzanne Fleischman and Giulia Centineo, both deal with pragmatic functions of tense – and specifically of tense alternation – in several varieties of Romance narrative discourse. Fleischman's chapter looks at tense as a marker of point of view, and at how tense alternations operate to discriminate the different

"focalizations" or perspectival filters through which a story-world is presented. Using data drawn from French, Spanish, and Italian narrative fiction, she considers such phenomena as free indirect discourse and interior monologue in terms of the tenses that mark these varieties of discourse off from the narrations into which they are embedded, the tense shifts enabling subtle transitions into and out of the minds of story participants. Though the focus of this chapter is on literary narration, Fleischman points to the existence of similar discourse strategies in natural narration in an attempt to narrow the gap many investigators perceive between poetic discourse and natural language.

Giulia Centineo's chapter takes as its point of departure the failure of extant grammatical descriptions of Italian to account adequately for the contrast in narrative discourse between the two perfective tenses of the past system: the compound past (*passato prossimo*) and the simple past (*passato remoto*). The explanations traditionally offered – dialect differences or speech vs. writing – fail in particular to account for the contrast in discourse forms where both past tenses can occur and at times co-occur. One such discourse form is "natural" narration. Through this investigation into tense selection – and specifically tense switching – in Italian natural narratives, Centineo seeks to provide a more compelling analysis of the functions of these two past tense categories, and of the historical present, based on a number of grammatical and pragmatic factors involved in the structuring of narrative discourse: clause type, foregrounding, evaluation, and subjectivity vs. objectivity of representation. The various patterns of tense usage identified in Italian narration today are then shown to correlate with diachronic shifts in meaning observed in several varieties of Romance with respect to simple and compound pasts.

In their contribution, Monique Monville-Burston and Linda Waugh study the French present tense, which they characterize as a rich communicative device having the potential for two or more simultaneous meanings, given the appropriate context. This semantic multivalency is linked on the one hand to the possibilities inherent in the present as the unmarked tense of the French system and on the other hand to the types of contexts in which it may be used. The authors focus on the historical present in journalistic discourse, which supports and perhaps even favors the proposed multisemanticity, and show that in certain contexts there may be oscillation for a given present tense form between a historical present interpretation and one or more of the other interpretations of present, producing temporal multivalency. Moreover, there are also cases of aspectual multivalency. This coexistence of two (or more) meanings is linked to the nature of

journalistic discourse and to specific characteristics of the local context: temporal adverbs, date of the newspaper, nature of titles/leads, lexical meaning of the verb, and the presence of other tenses.

The chapter by Béatrice Lamiroy and Pierre Swiggers claims that some imperative forms of the verb in French, Spanish, and Italian function as discourse signals, since they are connectors rather than commands, and thus serve as linkers between different segments of an utterance and/or between the participants in a communicative exchange. In terms of the authors' typology of discourse signals, these forms are morphologically analyzable and undergo some of the paradigmatic alternation characteristic of the general class of imperatives (e.g. alternation between singular and plural), but they exhibit few of the normal discourse-pragmatic properties of true imperatives. Rather, they have basically a pragmatic function, subsuming a number of morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties which are related to that function. Thus, the authors argue, these verbal forms have undergone functional displacement.

The next two chapters deal with the Spanish verb form in *-ra* (*amara*, *tuviera*), currently classified as an imperfect subjunctive, but formerly in Spanish, and etymologically in Latin, a pluperfect indicative.

Patricia Lunn and Thomas Cravens' examination of the use of *-ra* in journalistic texts provides motivation for the current classification of the *-ra* form as a bona fide subjunctive within a unified description of mood choice in Spanish centered on the notion of "discourse relevance." Departing from the traditional view linking the use of the subjunctive with the reality status of events (i.e. correlation with irrealis), they argue that the subjunctive marks information that a speaker takes to be of lesser relevance to the addressee, i.e. information that has lower priority, or is backgrounded, in the discourse. This characterization then provides the descriptive framework for a reappraisal of the traditional understanding of the *-ra* form's functions in the earliest Spanish texts, and demonstrates that the usage condemned by the Real Academia is solidly motivated on pragmatic grounds and in fact has a long history.

Flora Klein-Andreu looks at the *-ra* form along similar lines of discourse saliency, focusing on its development from pluperfect indicative to imperfect subjunctive. Taking issue with accounts which give primary importance to the *-ra* form's early role in the apodosis of conditional sentences, which led eventually to its usage in the protasis and thence to its current function for non-assertive reference, she claims that the shift in meaning was motivated by the competition

between it and the new periphrastic pluperfect (*habia amado*). By examining examples from the period when the new and old pluperfect indicatives were both still used, she contrasts their functions in terms of the relative "focus of attention" the speaker wishes to place on an event (high vs. low focus).

The last two chapters in this volume treat complementation in Spanish, one continuing the discussion of mood, the other focused in particular on transitivity.

Jorge Guitart presents a pragmatic analysis of the selection of indicative vs. subjunctive mood in Spanish in the complements of two predicate types: "knowledge" and "acquisition-of-knowledge" predicates (e.g. *saber, darse cuenta*, and *notar, descubrir* respectively). His treatment differs significantly from both traditional accounts and from certain current analyses, particularly from the theory of mood selection based on semantically grounded notions of assertion and presupposition. Arguing that there are no invariable correlations between semantic notions like presupposition and the use of one or the other mood, he distinguishes semantic presupposition, which is independent of speaker and hearer relationships, from pragmatic presupposition, which is equivalent to an assumption on the part of the speaker that the information in the sentential complement is shared by the hearer – and uses the latter as a crucial basis for his analysis. Moreover, he provides a pragmatic explanation for certain phenomena observed in the syntax of Spanish negation.

The chapter by Elizabeth Weber and Paola Bentivoglio presents a discourse profile of two verbs of cognition in Spanish, *creer* "believe" and *pensar* "think," through an examination of the syntactic variation exhibited by clauses in which these verbs occur. The syntactic properties characteristic of the class of cognition verbs (transitivity, complement type, tense-aspect, lexical choice, intonation contours, and relative ordering of main and subordinate clauses) are specifically related to the syntagmatic patterns associated with these verbs in actual discourse. Inspired by recent work arguing for the discourse origins of grammatical phenomena, this chapter seeks to explain the emergence of the syntactic patterns identified in terms of the demands which discourse use places on these verbs.

While the chapters in this volume have in common a general commitment to a more contextualized treatment of grammatical meaning, as may be inferred from the characterizations just given, they do not all operate with a uniform approach to discourse-pragmatics. Nevertheless, there are various notions that recur in several of the chapters,

such as: the pragmatic functions of tense switching (Fleischman, Centineo, Monville-Burston and Waugh); the use of verbal categories for signaling discourse saliency, i.e. the marking of textual foreground and background (Vet, Centineo, Lunn and Cravens, Klein-Andreu), for showing point of view (Fleischman, Vet), and for conveying irony (Guitart, Lunn and Cravens); the pragmatic determinants of language change (Lamiroy and Swiggers, Lunn and Cravens, Klein-Andreu, Weber and Bentivoglio); the interrelation of system, i.e. paradigmatic comparison, and use, i.e. contextualization (Monville-Burston and Waugh, Lamiroy and Swiggers, Klein-Andreu); and the pragmatic functions of the lexical meanings of verbs (Vet, Monville-Burston and Waugh, Lamiroy and Swiggers, Weber and Bentivoglio).

It is the recurrence of these and other themes, as well as the insights they offer into the functions and uses of grammatical categories associated with the verb, which will, we hope, induce those interested in the analysis of verbal categories – from whatever perspective – to explore further the contribution of discourse-pragmatic approaches.

We would like to thank the editors of this series, Nigel Vincent and Martin Harris, for their support of this project.

(Copyright information: A revised version of Suzanne Fleischman's chapter appears in chapter 7 of her book *Tense and Narrativity*, London: Routledge, 1990.)

REFERENCES

Givón, Talmy (ed.) (1979) *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 12 *Discourse and Syntax*, New York: Academic Press.

Hopper, Paul (ed.) (1982) *Tense-Aspect: Between Semantics and Pragmatics*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Hopper, Paul and Thompson, Sandra (eds) (1982) *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 15 *Studies in Transitivity*, New York: Academic Press.

Klein-Andreu, Flora (ed.) (1983) *Discourse Perspectives on Syntax*, New York: Academic Press.

Lo Cascio, Vincenzo and Vet, Co (eds) (1986) *Temporal Structure in Sentence and Discourse*, Dordrecht: Foris.

Tedeschi, Philip and Zaenen, Annie (eds) (1981) *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 14 *Tense and Aspect*, New York: Academic Press.

Vincent, Nigel and Harris, Martin (eds) (1982) *Studies in the Romance Verb*, London: Croom Helm.

2   The temporal structure of discourse: setting, change, and perspective

Co Vet

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

The function of tense and aspect in narrative texts has given rise to an extensive literature in which two main lines of thought can be distinguished. The first makes use of a spatial metaphor to describe the temporal structure of (narrative) texts: "foreground" versus "background" or "figure" versus "ground" (Weinrich 1973; Hopper 1982; Fleischman 1985; and, for a survey of the question, Waugh and Monville-Burston 1986). In this approach the discourse function of the perfective aspect, the simple past in Romance languages, is to indicate which events belong to the main plot-line of the story (the foreground or figure). Sentences with imperfective aspect, the imperfective past, serve to describe states of affairs which constitute the background of the story (they give information about the setting in which the story takes place, contain comments, etc.).

The second approach sees the relation between the two types of states of affairs described by the sentences of a text as being anaphoric (Partee 1973, 1984; Kamp 1981, 1984; Kamp and Rohrer 1983; Hinrichs 1981; Vet and Molendijk 1986). Roughly speaking, sentences in the simple past (the *passé simple* in French, for example) introduce temporal antecedents for the states of affairs reported by sentences in the *imparfait* (Kamp 1981), or introduce a reference point to which the state of affairs described by the *imparfait* sentence has to be attached (Kamp and Rohrer 1983).

Both the foregrounding/backgrounding and the anaphora approach offer interesting and intuitively satisfactory insights into the way the imperfective and perfective aspects or tenses function in narrative discourse. However, both also meet with serious problems. The foregrounding/backgrounding approach runs the risk of circularity: very often the only formal clue for deciding whether a state of affairs

belongs to the foreground or background of the story is precisely the presence in the sentence of one of the two aspect markers or tense forms. It has been shown, too, that the notions of foreground/background are too narrow (Waugh and Monville-Burston 1986) or that there is not a clearcut dichotomy but rather a continuum between the two levels (Fleischman 1985).

The anaphora approach meets with quite different problems. For example, there is no complete parallelism between nominal and temporal anaphora; with nominal anaphora the antecedent and the anaphoric element denote the same individual. This is rather exceptional with temporal anaphora. Most often the "anaphoric element" coincides here only partially with its temporal antecedent, but examples where the anaphoric element is posterior or even anterior to it are also relatively frequent. Criteria which are capable of predicting the right relationships are difficult to formulate in this approach.

In this chapter a proposal will be formulated which is capable of solving the problems encountered by the anaphora approach. It will be shown that the "overt" tense markers and adverbials of a text do not provide the hearer/reader with sufficient information for a correct interpretation and that it has to be completed by information conveyed by the *Aktionsart* of the sentences and/or by purely pragmatic factors. The general idea is that all the temporal and aspectual information (overt and covert) is used for two purposes: either to construct "settings" or to modify these settings.

It will also be shown that it is sometimes necessary to take into account "perspective." In some of the fragments analyzed in this chapter it is important to know who perceives the (modification of the) setting.

The chapter is structured as follows. In section 2 I will give an outline of the anaphora theory proposed by Partee (1973), Kamp (1981, 1984) and Kamp and Rohrer (1983), and discuss some of its main problems. In section 3 the role of the "temporal theme" (Ducrot 1983) and *Aktionsart* will be discussed. In section 4 the distinction between settings and change will be given a more precise formulation and a number of illustrative fragments will be analyzed by means of these notions. In section 5 it will be shown how this approach can solve the problems of the anaphora approach, and in the final section the role of "perspective" will be briefly examined.

2. ANAPHORIC TEMPORAL RELATIONS

To my knowledge Partee (1973) contains the first attempt to draw a parallel between nominal and temporal anaphora. For example, in both (1) and (2), the underlined parts have to be regarded as anaphoric: the event *got drunk* of (2) has to be interpreted as taking place at the time of the party; it refers back to a temporal antecedent in the preceding sentence just as *it* refers back to *the car* (in 1):

(1) Sam took the car yesterday and Sheila took *it* today.
(2) Sheila had a party last night and Sam *got drunk*.

Partee shows that there are parallel cases of deictic and bound temporal anaphora as well.

    Kamp (1979, 1981, 1984) offers an elaborate proposal for the treatment of pronouns in the so-called donkey sentences (*If Pedro owns a donkey he beats it*) and of the French *imparfait* [Imp] and *passé simple* [PS]. I will indicate here how the latter two are handled in this framework. Kamp regards the tenses as giving instructions about the way in which the temporal relations between the states of affairs have to be interpreted. These relations are first represented in a discourse representation structure (DRS) of a text and next the DRS is interpreted in a model. The idea is that the Imp and the PS introduce entities of different natures into the DRS, namely "states" and "events." See the following example (from Kamp (1981)):

(3) Pedro entra [PS] dans la cuisine. Marie faisait [Imp] la vaisselle. Il passa [PS] au salon et alluma [PS] sa pipe.
    "Pedro entered the kitchen. Marie was washing the dishes. He went to the living room and lit his pipe."

This means that the PS of the first sentence introduces an event into the DRS, e1, and establishes the relation e1 < n (e1 is anterior to the speech point (n)). The Imp of the second sentence gives the instruction to introduce a state into the DRS, s1, and to look in the preceding part of the DRS for an event with which an overlapping relation has to be established. In the fragment of (3) the event to be found is e1, so that the relation "e1 O s1" can be represented in the DRS (where "O" stands for the overlapping relation). The PS of the third sentence introduces a second event into the DRS, e2, and the rules prescribe now that a posteriority relation has to be established between this e2 and the event which was last introduced into the DRS (in our case e1), so that e2 > e1 (or, equivalently, e1 < e2) (where > stands for "posterior to" and < for "anterior to"). The rules for the PS stipulate