

# Where is procedural meaning located? Evidence from discourse connectives and tenses



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## Abstract

The main goal of this article is to make a proposal about where procedural meaning is located. Procedural meaning is defined as guiding the processing of conceptual information, whereas conceptual meaning includes information about the representation of entities, for instance objects or events. Conceptual information for connectives is described at the level of entailment, explicature and implicature, and may indicate possible causal relations among the events described, whereas procedural information for causal connectives is restricted to indicating the direction of the causal relation (forward or backward). Conceptual information for tenses specifies temporal coordinates, while procedural meaning specifies directional and subjective properties of events, using features such as [ $\pm$ narrative] or [ $\pm$ subjective]. A second goal is to answer a central question for pragmatics: what is the contribution of connectives, that is, what is the difference between discourses with and without connectives? The pragmatic framework adopted, which is based on Relevance Theory, gives the following answer: in a discourse without connectives, the accessibility of the intended interpretation depends solely on the context, whereas the use of connectives allows a simpler route, reducing the number of inferential steps and helping to determine semantic and pragmatic contents such as entailments, explicatures and implicatures.

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## 1. Introduction

Not all works on connectives appeal to the notion of procedural meaning. This is mainly due to the choice of research framework – formal vs. cognitive – and partly due to the nature of the research questions asked. To illustrate, it has been observed using experimental methods that the presence of causal connectives increases recall of information in text comprehension (Sanders and Noordman, 2000; Sanders, 2005). So from a cognitive perspective, the role of discourse connectives goes beyond merely ensuring discourse coherence: they affect performance in comprehension tasks, by increasing information recall. From a relevance-theoretic perspective, this result is not surprising and could be addressed by assuming that the type of meaning encoded by connectives (mainly procedural meaning) activates more salient routes in the discourse comprehension process, whose outputs should therefore be easier to recall. I will pursue this idea here.

From a theory-neutral perspective, an adequate account of discourse connectives should suggest answers to the following research questions: (a) What explains the differences in meaning between discourses with and without

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connectives? (b) What type of meaning do discourse connectives have, and what is its function? (c) Where is the meaning of discourse connectives located? (d) How are meaning variations in discourse linked to the use of connectives? These are traditional issues raised by various approaches to discourse connectives. However, these questions have not all received clear and convincing answers.

Question (a) is generally answered, as in [Blakemore \(1987, 2002\)](#), by claiming that connectives facilitate discourse comprehension: they guide the comprehension process by giving instructions on how to process and connect discourse segments.<sup>1</sup> Question (b) also receives a classical answer within Relevance Theory, with the notion of *procedural meaning* ([Wilson and Sperber, 2012](#), chapter 7). But procedural meaning is not clearly delimited in linguistic terms, because (i) discourse connectives are not a natural class (they belong to different grammatical categories), (ii) some connectives, like *and* or *because*, are described as having both conceptual and procedural meaning ([Blakemore, 2002](#); [Carston, 2002](#); [Fraser, 2006](#); [Mauri and van der Auwera, 2012](#)), and (iii) procedural meaning is not restricted to connectives.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, question (c), which is concerned not only with whether the meaning of connectives is linguistically encoded or pragmatically inferred, but also with where the encoding is located, has not been explicitly addressed (for exceptions, see [Fraser, 2006](#); [Mauri and van der Auwera, 2012](#)). In general, connectives with procedural meaning have not been seen as encoding concepts. Finally, the classical description of how and why discourse connectives have different meanings in use (question d) is originally due to Ducrot: a general argumentative meaning template receives different values on different occasions, thus explaining meaning variation (see the descriptions of *d'ailleurs* and *mais* in [Ducrot et al., 1980](#)).

In this paper, I would like to give precise answers to these four questions, within a general pragmatic framework whose main focus is on the nature of the semantics-pragmatics interface. In other words, I will present proposals designed to explain: (a) the contribution of connectives to discourse meaning; (b) the nature of their meaning; (c) the location of their meaning; (d) their variations in meaning on different occasions of use.

In order to correctly address the issue of how the conceptual–procedural distinction applies to connectives, I will make some incidental observations about tenses. This is mainly because, apart from connectives, they have been most extensively discussed as prototypical examples of devices encoding procedural meaning (see for instance [Amenós-Pons, 2011](#); [Escandell-Vidal and Leonetti, 2011](#); [Moeschler et al., 1998](#); [Saussure, 2003, 2012](#)), but also because some precise proposals have been made about the interplay between conceptual and procedural meaning in the analysis of tense ([Grisot, 2015](#); [Grisot and Moeschler, 2014](#); [Moeschler et al., 2012](#) for instance). These incidental observations will provide strong evidence on how representation and computation are linguistically distributed in a language like French.

The article is organized as follows: section 2 discusses some differences in meaning between discourses with and without connectives; section 3 makes a proposal about the conceptual/procedural distinction; section 4 is about tenses and their procedural meaning; section 5 considers where the meaning of discourse connectives is located; and section 6 gives an overall explanation for the differences in meaning between discourses with and without connectives.

## 2. What explains the differences in meaning between discourses with and without connectives?

Let us begin by looking at connectives, and in particular at the difference between discourse sequences with and without connectives. [Blochowiak \(2014\)](#) discusses this issue in relation to the temporal and causal readings of *and* and *because*, where some striking differences are found:

1. In certain cases, the temporal relation associated with *and* is lost when the connective is absent, and the second segment is then understood as an explanation (cf. the so-called Bar-Lev and Palacas puzzle).
2. Although *and* clauses cannot in general provide explanations, a certain subset of cases seem to involve explanatory uses of *and* (Horn's example).
3. Although *because* clauses typically describe causes, in epistemic and speech-act uses (abductive uses in [Sweetser, 1990](#)), the temporal relations that normally hold between the two discourse segments are reversed.

Let's begin with the contrast between temporal and causal relations with *and*, illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. We spent the day in town *and* I went to Harrods.  
 b. She shot him in the head *and* he died instantly.  
 c. I forgot to hide the cake *and* the children consumed it.

<sup>1</sup> This is the same line of argument found in Ducrot's work on connectives: their meaning is an instruction on discourse interpretation ([Ducrot et al., 1980](#)).

<sup>2</sup> Procedural meaning has been attributed to negation ([Carston, 1996](#); [Moeschler, 1997](#)), pronouns (deictic and anaphoric, [Wilson and Sperber, 2012](#), chapter 7) and tenses ([Moeschler et al., 1998](#); [Saussure, 2003](#); [Grisot and Moeschler, 2014](#)), to name but a few.

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