DIVERSITY AND COMPLEXITY OF LINGUISTIC RELATIONS

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Abstract:This paper aims at highlighting some aspects regarding linguistic relations, seen from the diversity and complexity perspective. In doing so, it starts from basic semantic relations and continues up to difficult syntactic ones, whose functions are not always easy to identify. A clear distinction between diversity and complexity is required as the two notions/characteristics do not overlap in all the situations. Each type of relation between words is worth not only mentioning, but also debating and describing.

Keywords: complexity, diversity, linguistic, relations, semantics

The idea of this paper occurred starting from the hypothesis that a linguistic relation can be identified between any linguistic terms, correlated or not. The approach to this topic is situated at the confluence between diversity and complexity, trying to demonstrate the essential role played by the linguistic description of a linguistic relation.

Language, this capacity of speaking, of communicating represents a human characteristic and has been the center of research interest since ancient times. Consequently, linguists have studied language and its systems through different branches, joined in a large linguistic sphere, called Linguistics. Step by step, linguistic branches succeeded in giving competent, logical answers to many qestions regarding: speech sounds, their physiological properties, their classification and description*(Phonetics)*, the study of speech sounds as systems, their combination in syllables, words, and intonational phrases *(Phonology)*, the internal structure of words, their specific categories and formal properties *(Morphology)*, rules of combining words to form phrases and sentences. *(Syntax)*, the relationship between linguistic form and meaning (*Semantics)***,** the relationship between linguistic form and use*(Pragmatics)***,** the linguistic study of texts, narrative structure, style, genre, etc.*(Discourse)*, the study of language variation across

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different regions and social groups, influenced by gender, ethnicity, class, religion, etc.*(Sociolinguistics)*, the study of language changes over time *(Historical linguistics)*,the study of language from a psychological perspective*(Psycholinguistics)*, the way language expresses cultural meaning and creates or reinforces social relationships and identities*(Anthropological linguistics) a.s.o.*Each of these scientific, linguistic branches have brought its distinct contribution to the development of language studies, revealing new, interesting idea that lasted more or less over time, such as Ferdinand de Saussure's langue and parole, or Leonard Bloomfield's structuralism or Noam Chomski's generative grammar.

Starting from the idea that a linguistic relation may be viewed as a relation between forms and constituents, we may come to the conclusion that some linguistic relations are in praesentia, such as the syntagmatic relation (which is linear and accepts different combinations of words), while some others are in absentia, such as the paradigmatic relation (when the choice of a component excludes the choice of another).

Different combinations of words, phrases or sentences create different linguistic relations which, sometimes, derive one from the other. For example, an additive relation is a kind of interpropositional relation in which the propositions/sentences are considered to be closely related or built one on another. This is the case of clauses coordinated by *and* :

Eg. John cannot come to the party; and how about your brother?

A proposition is the meaning core of a clause or sentence that remains unchanged, even if there might occur changes either in the voice or in the illocutionary force of the clause.

Eg. *A nice young lady is walking in the park.* can be decomposed into:

A lady is nice.

A lady is young.

A lady is walking in the park.

In spite of the changes, the three proposition combined maintain the meaning. This shows that among interpropositional relations, which can be defined as explicit or inferred

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coherence relations between propositions, a proposition may find a connection with other relations, for instance with temporal relations, with logical relations, with solutionhood relations etc.

The solutionhood relation is an interesting, distinct type of interpropositional relation, which contains a proposition that acts as an answer or solution to a situation presented in a previous proposition. (Mann and Thompson, 1985)

Eg. *You a sleepy; go to bed.*

Besides the above mentioned ones, we can distinguish some other interpropositional relations. For instance, the external relation is a kind of interpropositional relation characterized by the fact that a situation is described in the proposition by extralinguistic reality, not by a simple usage of propositions:

Eg. *If the weather is fine, there is a live concert on the stadium at 8.*

(The concert will be held if the weather permits)

On the other hand, if the situation is described only by its communicative usage, we refer to an internal relation.

Eg. *If you have no other plan , there is a live concert on the stadium at 8.*

(If you don't have a plan I offer you an alternative, that is there is a live concert on the stadium at 8.)

If there is an interpropositional relation between several propositions, of which one or more are considered to be true, although not necessarily, we deal with an internal alternative relation, which consists of some subtypes. An example of internal alternative relation is the ascetainment relation which means that a following proposition gives an alternative circumstance where a preparatory condition of the illocutionary act that includes the anterior proposition, is not present. (Dijk, 1981)

Eg. *Do you want to go to bed? Or aren't you sleepy?*

Open the door! Or don't you hear the bell ringing?

Another type of alternative relation is the emphatic alternative relation, which stresses the idea of various possibilities. On the other hand, if only one proposition is true, the alternative relation is an exclusive one. (Hollenbach, 1975)

Eg. *John goes on that trip or he stays home.*

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and if more than one proposition may be true, the alternative relation is an inclusive one.

Eg. *John goes on a trip, or visits his cousin in Paris or goes to the seaside.*

Sometimes a proposition or more are meant to provide information in order to better understand other propositions.

Eg. *John is ringing the bell; would you open him the door?*

The first proposition provides background information for the second and this interpropositional relation is a background relation. (Matthiessen and Thompson, 1987)

An interesting type of interpropositional relation is the causal relation, which implies reasoning and which can be subdivided into several subtypes. One of these is the means-purpose relation, which refers to the fact that a proposition is meant to bring about a state/event presented by another proposition, without stressing the idea of achievement of the respective state/event.

Eg. *John tiptoed lest he should be heard by his parents.*

If the idea of achievement of the state/event is present, the causal relation is a means-result relation.

Eg. *Since John tiptoed, he wasn't heard by his parents.*

When the proposition expresses an state/event that brings about another state/event, the causal relation is a reason-result relation.

Eg. *John was absent, so he didn't understand the lesson.*

A special kind of interpropositional relation is the so called contraction relation, which means that the previously mentioned information is partially restated. (Longacre, 1983) This resembles, up to a point, the echo-questions.

Eg. *John doesn't like football, he really doesn't like.* (contraction relation)

John doesn't like football. Doesn't like? (echo-question)

The contrast relation may be an antithesis relation, if the contrasted propositions are incompatible with each other

Eg. *Rather than travel by bus I prefer riding a bike.*

When the speaker corrects or redefines a contrasted proposition, the antithesis relation becomes a correction relation.

Eg. *I will ask her to forgive me; in fact, I will beg her.*

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Sometimes, in an interpropositional relation, a proposition gives details about another proposition. This is the case of the elaboration relation, which, in its turn, may become an amplification relation if further information is added to an initial proposition.

Eg. *John is a student; he is an intelligent student.*

If the proposition describes an attribute of a referent of another proposition, the elaboration relation is an attribution relation.

Eg. *I've met John's brother; he is a handsome, well-dressed young man.*

Another type of interpropositional relation, called justification relation, is established when a proposition offers the basis, even the right of the speaker to produce an illocutionary act which was expressed in a following proposition.

Eg. *Justin Bieber concert; This is just an announcement and I'll provide you more info when I have it.*

In the given example the announcement is folowed by two clauses meant to explain/justify the lack of details.

Close to the justification relation is the motivation relation in which the purpose of a proposition is to increase the interest of persons addressed to, for an announcement communicated in a previous proposition. (Man and Thomson, 1987)

Eg. *Justin Bieber in concert this weekend. Free entrance! He will give an exceptional show together with hiswonderful surprise guests.*

The last sentences motivate why people should be present at Justin Bieber's concert announced in the first one.

Sometimes a proposition interferes in another proposition, not as an explanation, but as a digression, usually placed between hyphens. This is a parenthesis relation, signalled or not by some words and phrases.

Eg. *My birthday party was an excellent one - by the way, thank you for the beautiful flowers - and everybody enjoyed it.*

If a proposition paraphrases another proposition, then a restatement relation occurs.

Eg. *I couldn't go out because of the rain. But for the rain Icould have gone out.*

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The interpropositional relation that expresses the idea of simultaneity or order in time of events is a temporal relation which, in its turn may be of several types. Therefore, we can speak of a beginning-postspan temporal relation in which an event shows the begining of a durative event;

Eg. *I have written a book **since** we last met.*

or a prespan-end temporal relation, which means that an event shows the end of a durative event.

Eg. *I read the letter so many times **until** I got the message.*

On the other hand, a temporal relation may be previous, simultaneous or posterior. The previousness relation refers to the idea that an event is expressed in a proposition prior to another expressed proposition;

Eg. *John went to the cinema after he had finished his homework. (John went to the cinema. Previously he had finished his homework.)*

The simultaneous relation refers to the fact that two or more events are expressed in propositions as taking place simultaneously, in the same time.

Eg. *John was watching TV **while** his wife was cooking. (His wife was cooking and **meanwhile**, John was watching TV.)*

*John **simultaneously** watched TV and ate apples.*

The posterior relation refers to the idea that an event is expressed in a proposition posterior to another expressed proposition. (Fleming, 1988:182)

Eg. *John had finished his homework **before** he went to the cinema . (John had finished his homework **and than/ after that** he went to the cinema.)*

In all these temporal relations is easy to identify the temporal syntactic function of the subordinate clause. (Halliday and Hasan, 1976)

A very frequent type of propositional relations is the logical relation, which comprises several subtypes: the concession relation, the conditional relation, the

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proportional relation etc.The concession relation may be defined as a logical relation that implies a certain degree of unexpectedness between propositions. In other words, a proposition is expressed as unexpected (the so-called contraexpectation) from the perspective of another proposition (the so-called concession).

Eg. ***Although*** *it was raining, we went to the theatre.*

If the concesive clause is introduced by a subordinator that means *in spite of / despite the fact that*, the relation is a definite concessive relation.

Eg. ***Even though*** *John is a hard-worker, he is not well appreciated.*

John couldn't remember the correct answer, ***although*** *he had learnt the lesson.*

If the concesive clause is marked by an expression that means *no matter*, the relation is an indefinite concessive relation.(Thompson and Longacre, 1985)

Eg. *No matter how hard he worked, John was not appreciated.*

Whatever he says, I don't trust him

The conditional relation may be defined as a logical relation between two propositions which depend on each other, i.e. a proposition is true only if the other proposition is true. (Johnson-Laird, 1986: 61)

Eg. *If you give the correct answer, you will get the prize.*

If a relation between a consequent and a condition is established, it is a biconditional relation, i.e. the consequent is true if and only if the condition is true.(Haiman, 1986)

Eg. *I will come to the party if and only if John invites me personally*.

We can also discuss about a negative conditional relation, in which the conditional clause is marked by a subordinator meaning *unless.*

Eg. *John will go to the cinema unless it rains.*

John hasn't learned the lesson; otherwise he could have given the right answer.

Strictly connected to conditional relations is the proportional logical relation, which involves a range of conditional relations with a certain type of correlation.

Eg. *The more you learn, the better you know.*

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The above analyzed types of linguistic relations represent a small part of the possible relations in linguistics and examples to support them could continue, but since the diversity and the complexity of these relations are more than obvious, they really desearve to be described, analyzed and interpreted. The linguistic relations which were not mentioned in the present paper could become a topic for another paper.

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