Enrichment, Coherence, and Discourse Structure

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Enrichment, I

In (some of) the pragmatics literature, *enrichment*, or *pragmatic enrichment*, is an operation in interpretation.

It adds to what is sometime called *the minimal proposition*: i.e. by the result of standing (context independent) meaning together with values to indexicals/variables and the resolution of anaphora and ambiguity.

Enrichment is an operation that takes you from the minimal proposition to an enriched proposition, by means of adding *conceptual elements*. The enriched proposition belongs to *what is said* as opposed to what is *implicated*.

Sometimes, ‘enrichment’ is also used for the conceptual material that is added.
Enrichment, II

Example from Carston 2002, p. 71:

(1) a. He handed her the key and she opened the door.

b. He handed her the key and she opened the door
   [with the key that he had handed her].

Here the typical enrichment to (1a) is represented in italics within the square brackets in (1b). Assuming a context for the indexical elements, (1b) as a whole expresses the enriched proposition pragmatically derived from (1a).
Enrichment, III

Enrichment is contrasted with other primary pragmatic processes.

Loosening/widening (Recanati 2004, p. 24):

(2) The ATM swallowed my credit card.

Semantic shift (Nunberg 1979; Nunberg 1995). Said by one waiter to another:

(3) The ham sandwich is sitting at table 20.

There is also narrowing/generality narrowing, but it is somewhat controversial how it relates to enrichment:

(4) It’s going to take time for these wounds to heal.
Why enrichment?

There is a question what triggers enrichments.

One idea that does not work is Charity. Explaining by means of Charity would mean that we need the enrichments to make the statement plausibly true.

Since the enriched propositions entail the original propositions, this does not work.
Coherence raising: the idea

I have suggested in earlier work (Pagin 2014) that enrichments are triggered by a tendency to interpret utterances in context so as to make the total interpretation as coherent as is possible (as long as reasonable).

I was following ideas by Hobbs (1985) and Kehler (2002), and adding new ideas about coherence ranking.
The ranking

I proposed an ordinal scale of coherence strength degrees:

*Scale of coherence strength*

0) Vacuity
1) Contiguity type relations
2) Resemblance type relations
3) Possibility type relations
4) Necessity type relations

Degree zero pertains to discourse without any coherence; degree 1 where there is spatio-temporal contiguity; degree 2 where there is a similarity among properties ascribed to individuals; degree 3 for weak causal relations (enabling); degree 4 for strong causal relations (causing).
The door opening revisited

The Carston door opening example

(1b) He handed her the key and she opened the door \([\textit{with the key that he had handed her}].\)

involves coherence raising from degree 2 to degree 3: we relate the two events by taking the first to enable the second.
The rising temperature

For a second example, consider:

(5)  
   a. The temperature has risen to a dangerous level.
   b. The temperature has risen \([\text{from a non-dangerous}]\) to a dangerous level.

Semantically, (5a) is true if the temperature has risen and after the rising is at a dangerous level, even if the level was equally or even more dangerous \(\text{before}\) the rising.

To make more sense of it as a report, we read into it that the level was not dangerous before the rising.

Explained by the theory: the rising is taken to \(\text{cause}\) the state of danger (indirectly). This reaches coherence degree 4.
The parallel alternative

In some cases coherence is not raised to the causal degrees because there is a plausible parallel interpretation (of degree 2).

(6) a. Mary embarrassed John, and Betty made fun of him.

b. Mary embarrassed John, and Betty made fun of him [because of that?].

The conjuncts satisfy a Parallel relation: two bad things happened to John. We therefore have a Resemblance degree coherence without enrichment.

We can also take the second conjunct to describe an effect of the event described in the first. This raises coherence. But the causal relation has not been made plausible. Ambiguity results.
Parallel, definite, and indefinite, I

In some cases, the choice between a definite and an indefinite determiner can affect the choice between causal and parallel relations:

(7)  
   a. Adam saw a bird and Bill wanted to buy it.  
   b. Adam saw the bird and Bill wanted to buy it.

We can raise coherence by finding a causal connection between Adam’s seeing and Bill’s desire. Our background theory tells us that making Bill aware of the bird fits the requirement.

This works well for (7a), but not for (7b). A parallel interpretation is available that blocks the raising.
Parallel, definite, and indefinite, II

Consider:

(8) a. The dog barked and the cat meowed.
b. The dog barked and a cat meowed.
c. A dog barked and the cat meowed.
d. A dog barked and a cat meowed.

There seems to be a pattern: causal connections are suggested when we combine an indefinite and a definite, but not in the other cases.
Parallel, definite, and indefinite, III

The pattern extends to the connection between attribution and predication:

(9)  a. A nice man opened the door.
     b. The nice man opened the door.

We find the same contrast with plural determiners.

(10) a. Some brave men volunteered.
     b. Many brave men volunteered.
     c. Most brave men volunteered.
     d. All brave men volunteered.
A proposal, I

Consider again

(10a) Some brave men volunteered.

For each $x$, we have two facts: $x$ is a brave man, and $x$ volunteered.

We raise coherence: being brave causes $x$ to volunteer. Hence, volunteering is an act of bravery.

By attributing bravery to the agent, the speaker gives information about a property of the action, that it manifested bravery.
A proposal, II

What is going on? I propose the following:

The primary function of definites is identification. Definites refer to what is *given*, and attributed properties are selected to help identify the referent(s) among individuals already introduced.

The primary function of indefinites is to relate *new* entities to independently provided information, often already given. We expect new individuals to be introduced in a way that *adds* information about their relation to what is independently provided. Coherence raising is exploited for this purpose.

The basic new/given profiles of definites and indefinites explain the coherence pattern.
Thanks!


