

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/generalization 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 [*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 [*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 *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 *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!

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