

## METAREPRESENTATIONAL ACCOUNT OF DISJUNCT ADVERBIAL CLAUSES

### 1. Introduction: metarepresentational types of discourse

Linguistic research into how human metacognitive abilities are reflected in language (Wilson 2000; Noh 2000) has led to identifying several kinds of utterances which can be described as metarepresentational since they share the common property of using a representation to represent another representation. In this paper I would like to investigate a group of utterances which have so far received rather scant attention but which, I believe, should be added to the list of metarepresentational kinds of discourse, such as the ones discussed extensively by Noh (2000). At the moment the list includes:

(a) various reportative kinds of discourse, which “inform the hearer of the form or content of the original” (Noh 2000:91), e.g.:

- (1) Life is like a flowing river. (*pure quotation or an utterance representing a thought*)
- (2) Alice said: “Life is like a flowing river.” (*direct quotation of an utterance*)
- (3) Alice said that life was like a flowing river. (*indirect quotation of an utterance*)
- (4) Alice said that life is like a “flowing river.” (*mixed quotation of an utterance*)
- (5) Alice likened life to a flowing river. (*indirect quotation of an attributed thought*)

(b) diverse instances of mention, in which the speaker uses metarepresented abstract linguistic material in order to talk about various aspects of language, e.g.:

- (6) “Life is like a flowing river” is an example of a simile. (*mention of a sentence*)

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- (7) “Life” rhymes with “strife.” (*mention of the phonic form of a word*)  
 (8) “Get a life!” can be rude. (*mention of an utterance type*)

(c) echoic utterances, in which the speaker metarepresents a certain attributable representation in order to express his attitude to what is represented, e.g.:

- (9) Bob: I’m an expert on French wines.  
 Ann: An expert on French wines? (*disbelief*)  
 (10) Bob: I’m an expert on French wines.  
 (They go to a restaurant, where Bob confuses Bordeaux with Beaujolais)  
 Ann: An expert on French wines, indeed. (*irony*)

(d) metalinguistic negation, in which the speaker uses metarepresentations of form or content in order to reject some aspect of an attributed utterance or thought, e.g.:

- (11) He is not silly. He is utterly dumb. (*rejection of a description*)  
 (12) He wasn’t talking about mice, he wasn’t talking about lice. (*rejection of a lexical item*)

(e) echo questions, which can be analysed as asking questions about metarepresented aspects of attributed utterances or thoughts, e.g.:

- (13) Bob: I’m going fishing.  
 Ann: You’re going fishing? Weren’t you supposed to stay home and paint the shelves? (*echo of an utterance*)  
 (14) Bob: I’m going fishing.  
 Ann: You’re going fishing? I thought you were an indoor type.  
 (*echo of an utterance fragment*)  
 (15) Ann (seeing Bob walk towards the door, fishing gear in hand): You’re going fishing? (*echo of an attributed thought*)

(f) some ‘non-basic’ indicative conditionals, such as (16a), (17a) and (18a), in which, as argued by Noh (2000), the apparent lack of the causal-consequential link between the proposition expressed by the antecedent and the consequent can be accounted for if we assume that the former or the latter (or both) are not used to describe a state of affairs but to represent another representation, as indicated in (16b), (17b) and (18b):

- (16a) If two and eleven makes thirty, you need more work on maths. (Noh 2000:178)  
 (17a) If you’re thirsty, there’s beer in the fridge. (Noh 2000:195)

- (18a) Travel agent: Mexico City is beautiful.  
Customer: If Mexico City is beautiful, do they have a room? (Noh 2000: 206)
- (16b) If [YOU SAY THAT] two and eleven makes thirty, you need more work on maths.
- (17b) If you're thirsty, [IT WILL BE RELEVANT FOR YOU TO REMEMBER THAT] there's beer in the fridge.
- (18b) [IF YOU SAY/THINK] Mexico City is beautiful, [I WANT TO ASK] "do they have a room?"

## 2. Another metarepresentational type of discourse?

There seems to be yet another type of utterances containing metarepresentational elements, namely disjunct adverbial clauses, such as the ones which have been italicized in examples (19a), (20a) and (21a):

- (19a) They've lit a fire, *because I can see the smoke rising*. (Quirk et al. 1972: 11.37)
- (20a) *Since you're asking*, I was polite to his sister.
- (21a) The garden should be watered – *although you never listen to what I say*.

In terms of their syntactic status and the function they perform in the structure of the sentences in which are embedded, disjunct adverbial clauses clearly differ from their adjunct counterparts, such as the ones in (19b), (20b) and (21b):

- (19b) They've lit a fire *because the night is cold*.
- (20b) *Since I know my manners*, I was polite to his sister.
- (21b) The garden should be watered *although the soil looks quite moist*.

Unlike adjunct adverbial clauses, disjunct clauses do not modify anything in the sentence in which they occur. Rather, they modify the whole sentence and allow the speaker to provide some comment about the facts he is reporting. Unlike adjunct clauses, which are more closely integrated in the structure of the main clause, disjunct clauses are peripheral to the main clause, which is often indicated by a distinct intonation in speech or by punctuation in writing (a comma or a dash).

### 3. Disjunct adverbial clauses vs. their adjunct counterparts

The question which I would like to address here is what sets disjunct adverbial clauses off from their adjunct counterparts and allows them to perform a different role in the structure of the sentence in which they are embedded. A number of possible explanations spring to mind. First, that the special character of disjunct clauses is determined by some aspect of meaning of the connectives used. Second, that the existence of adjunct and disjunct adverbial clauses reflects two distinct uses each connective has. Another possible solution is that disjunct clauses should be treated as elliptical. Finally, and this is what I will try to demonstrate, that the peculiar properties of disjunct clauses result from the metarepresentational elements present either in the subordinate or in the main clause. Let us examine these possibilities in detail.

### 4. Adverbial clauses and the linguistic meaning of the connective used

At first glance it might seem tempting to assume that the different status of adjunct and disjunct clauses hinges on the kind of connective which is used to introduce the clause. In the relevance-theoretic framework two kinds of connectives are distinguished depending on what kind of meaning they encode. As argued by (Rouchota 1998), conceptual connectives, such as *because*, *before* or *after*, are said to encode concepts and establish conceptual links between propositions whereas procedural ones, such as *although*, *since* or *as*, “do not link propositions at any stage of the interpretation process” but “indicate the computations such representations are intended to undergo” (Rouchota 1998: 51-52).

Any attempt to pair off the two kinds of adverbial clauses with the two types of connectives has to be abandoned, however, since adjunct and disjunct clauses can both be introduced by both kinds of connectives. Nevertheless, positing the existence of procedural and conceptual connectives can explain why some adjunct adverbial clauses, namely those introduced by procedural connectives, fail to meet diagnostic tests for adjuncts. Quirk et. al. (1972: 8.3) present several criteria for distinguishing adjuncts from disjuncts. Interestingly, they seem to apply to only one of the three kinds of adjunct clauses discussed here, namely the ones introduced by the conceptual connective *because*. As indicated by examples (22) – (24), only *because*-clauses can be contrasted with other adverbials in alternative negation:

- (22a) They haven't lit a fire *because the night is cold* but *because they find it romantic*.

- (22b) \*The garden shouldn't be watered *although the soil looks quite moist* but *although it is going to rain*.
- (22c) \*I wasn't polite to his sister *since I know my manners* but *since she was polite to me*.

Only *because*-adjunct clauses can be contrasted with other adverbials in alternative interrogation:

- (23a) Have they lit a fire *because the night is cold* or *because they find it romantic*?
- (23b) \*Should the garden be watered *although the soil looks quite moist* or *although it is going to rain*?
- (23c) \*Were you polite to his sister *since you know your manners* or *since she was polite to you*?

Finally, only *because*-adjunct clauses can be the focus of cleft-sentences:

- (24a) It is *because the night is cold* that they've lit a fire.
- (24b) \*It is *although the soil looks quite moist* that the garden should be watered.
- (24c) \*It was *since I know my manners* that I was polite to his sister.

It may be argued that tests such as these can be successfully applied only to clauses introduced by conceptual connectives. After all, they exploit the truth-functional properties of conceptual representations, i.e. the representations which can enter into logical relations, which are capable of describing states of affairs and of being true or false. Procedural information encoded in connectives such as *although* or *since*, whose function is to provide a constraint on the inferential processes conceptual representations are supposed to undergo, is not truth-functional and cannot be manipulated in this manner.

## 5. Diverse meanings or uses of the connectives

Another way of explaining the different status of the two kinds of adverbial clauses can be found in Sweetser's (1990: 76ff.) idea that each discourse connective can have different interpretations or uses. Sweetser identifies three such uses: (i) the "real-life" or content use, in which connectives relate states of affairs, (ii) the epistemic use, in which they indicate relations between epistemic states, and (iii) the speech-act use, in which they relate states of affairs to speech acts.

In the case of the connective *because*, all of its three uses are causal but in "the real world" use, seen in example (25), the causal link occurs between two

states of affairs: the fact that Tom had watered the garden caused the grass to be wet. In the epistemic use, seen in example (26), there is a causal link between a state of affairs and a thought or an utterance: the fact that the grass is wet leads the speaker to draw the conclusion that Tom has watered the garden. Finally, in the speech-act use (example 27) there is a causal connection between a state of affairs and a speech act: it is the fact that the grass looks parched that makes the speaker ask the hearer to water the garden.

- (25) The grass is wet *because Tom has watered the garden*. (*content use*)
- (26) Tom has watered the garden, *because the grass is wet*. (*epistemic use*)
- (27) Could you water the lawn, *because the grass looks parched*. (*speech-act use*)

The concessive connective *although*, too, is supposed to have three uses paralleling the three uses of *because*:

- (28) The grass is dry *although Tom has watered the garden*. (*content use*)
- (29) Tom hasn't watered the garden, *although the grass is wet*. (*epistemic use*)
- (30) Could you water the lawn, *although the grass doesn't look parched?* (*speech-act use*)

This time all three interpretations are concessive but when *although* is used as a content conjunction the interpretation of sentence (28) can be that the grass is dry despite the fact that Tom has watered the garden. In the epistemic use, illustrated by sentence (29), Tom has not watered the garden, despite the fact that the grass is wet, which might have led one to believe that Tom has watered it. Finally, in the speech-act use of *although* (example 30), the main import of the sentence is that the speaker is requesting the hearer to water the garden despite the fact that the grass doesn't look parched.

Can we assume then that the descriptive claims made in sentences containing adjunct adverbial clauses are the result of the connective operating in the "real-life" domain while the disjunct adverbial clauses owe their meaning to the epistemic or illocutionary interpretations of the connective?

A minor problem with this account is that it is not always clear what kind of speech act the speaker is supposed to be performing. This seems to be the case with examples such as (31) and (32), which might serve more than one communicative purpose:

- (31a) *Since you're an expert on wines*, what is the difference between a claret and a Bordeaux?
- (31b) *Since you're an expert on wines*, [TELL ME] what is the difference between a claret and a Bordeaux?

- (31c) *Since* [YOU CLAIM] *you're an expert on wines*, [I DARE YOU TO TELL ME] what is the difference between a claret and a Bordeaux?
- (31d) *Since you're an expert on wines*, [I EXPECT THAT YOU KNOW] the difference between a claret and a Bordeaux.
- (32a) *Since today is December 25*, "Merry Christmas!"
- (32b) *Since today is December 25*, [I WISH YOU] "Merry Christmas!"
- (32c) *Since today is December 25*, [IT IS APPROPRIATE TO SAY] "Merry Christmas!"

The main problem with the speech act account, however, is that it is unable to deal with disjunct adverbial clauses which are neither epistemic nor illocutionary. Consider, for instance examples (33) and (34):

- (33) Ann bought some tom[eiDouz], *though her British boyfriend would flinch at this pronunciation*.
- (34) We'll have some freedom fries for lunch, *since you insist on calling them that*.

Here the connectives cannot be said to establish a link between a state of affairs and a speech act, or between a state of affairs and an epistemic state. Rather the disjunct clause establishes a link to some aspect of an attributed utterance in the main clause, be it the pronunciation of a word or a choice of a lexical item.

## 6. The elliptical account of disjunct adverbial clauses

Another way to explain the different status of adjunct and disjunct adverbial clauses might be to argue that the latter are elliptical. After all, their contribution to the meaning of the main clause is often clarified by expanding their structure, as in examples (35) and (36):

- (35a) He is drunk, *because I saw him staggering*.
- (35b) He is drunk, [AND I CLAIM THAT] *because I saw him staggering*. (Quirk et. al. 1972: 9.23)
- (36a) Are you busy on Saturday morning? *Because there is a Matisse exhibition on*.
- (36b) Are you busy on Saturday morning? I am asking you *because there is a Matisse exhibition on*. (Rouchota 1998: 16)

However, if ellipsis is to be understood as the omission from a sentence, or other construction, of one or more words recoverable from the context then the elliptical character of disjunct adverbial clauses has to be rejected. First of all, the missing items are not uniquely recoverable from the context. As noted by Quirk et. al. (1972: 9.23), in (35) instead of “and I claim that”, other forms might be supplied, e.g. “and I know that,” “and I am sure of it,” “and I’m convinced of it,” “and the proof is”, etc. Moreover, when the missing elements are provided, in many cases the clause has to be changed, as in (37):

- (37a) While we’re discussing the problem of privacy, is it possible to install a proper lock in each office?  
 (37b) While we’re discussing the problem of privacy, [I WANT TO KNOW IF] *it is possible to install a proper lock in each office.*

### 7. The metarepresentational account of disjunct adverbial clauses

All the drawbacks of the elliptical model can be treated as arguments in favour of a metarepresentational account of disjunct adverbial clauses. In all of them the unexpressed elements clearly set up a higher level of representation in which the expressed material is embedded. Thus, rather than posit multiple meanings of connectives it might be argued that each connective has just one meaning, whether conceptual or procedural, and the epistemic and illocutionary meanings arise because of the implicit metarepresentational elements, which have to be recovered in the process of inference. For instance, the fully explicit version of examples (19a), (20a) and (21a) might take the following form:

- (19c) [I BELIEVE THAT] they’ve lit a fire *because the night is cold.*  
 (20c) *Since you’re asking,* [I WILL TELL YOU THAT] I was polite to his sister.  
 (21c) The garden should be watered. [I’M SAYING THIS] *although the soil looks quite moist.*

However, on this account, the unique recovery of the metarepresented material is not needed or even expected. The higher-order representations will be recovered in the process of pragmatic enrichment, i.e. the partially specified semantic representations will have to be filled in by an inferential process in which the hearer is guided by his expectation of relevance. Depending on the kind of hypothesis the hearer has formed about the speaker’s attitude to the proposition expressed, or the speech act he intended to perform, the lower-order representation will become embedded under a speech-act or propositional-attitude description, such as “the speaker believes that.”

In order to answer the question that was posed in this paper about what makes disjunct adverbial clauses different from their adjunct counterparts, we might say that in the latter the connectives link the subordinate clause to the proposition expressed by the main clause while in the former the connectives link the subordinate clause to a higher-order explicature of the main clause or to some element in the higher-order explicature of the main clause.

In the examples I have looked at here the metarepresented lower-order representations seem to be attributive, with the exception of (32), which does not have an identifiable source. Some are abstract (examples 33 and 34), the rest are either thoughts or utterances. The higher-order representations are predominantly self-attributive: with the exception of examples (33) and (34), it is the speaker who makes some epistemic claim or performs a speech act. Thus, if one were to provide a brief description of disjunct adverbial clauses, one might say that they can be treated as metarepresentational utterances in which the speaker uses metarepresentations usually of content, less often of form, in order to perform a speech act or make an existential claim.

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