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Relations and Metacomments In English Expository Discourse

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The work sets out to provide a pragmatic account of discourse relations and the indicators that make them explicit. The existing descriptions of relations as semantic links between sentences and clauses are extended by a consideration of addressers, addressees, and other contextual factors. Relations are viewed as phenomena which are intentionally established by the speaker through the performance of interactive acts. The latter, it is posited, constitute an additional category in the typology of speech acts generally recognized in speech act theory. Taxonomy of discourse relations is developed, giving rise to eight types, distinguished from each other by a set of dimensions which take account of the speaker's intentions, the degree of dependence between the two units of the relation, and the components of the two units. Two types from the taxonomy, CONTRAST and DETAIL, are described in great depth and characterized in terms of conditions relating to intentions and propositional content. These two types of interactive act are further categorized into their sub—types. The description of discourse relations is complemented by an examination of the expressions, here called 'relational Metacomments' which make explicit the speaker's intention on how the relations are to be interpreted. The relational metacomments are examined in terms of the role they play in CONTRAST and DETAIL relations — their grammar, their frequency in expository discourse, their position within the relation, and their cooccurrence with particular sub—types. It is demonstrated how RMCs function to supplement contextual features in clarifying the speaker's intentions. The description of interactive acts and relations is undertaken in order to provide some useful output for pedagogic purposes. The analysis of L data is thus matched with analysis of Tanzanian student essays. This latter shows that the students establish discourse relations in different ways from L speakers. Not only are the frequencies of relations and RMCs different, but the conditions for the establishment of relations are not always satisfied, or are satisfied in ways which markedly deviate from the norm. A need for the improvement of teaching discourse relations is thus clearly demonstrated. Specific areas to be focused on are pointed out, and exercises relating to these areas are developed in the last Chapter, to augment those which are presented in the existing grammars.

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