

Connective predicates in monologic and dialogic argumentation

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CONNECTIVE PREDICATES IN MONOLOGIC AND DIALOGIC ARGUMENTATION

The paper builds upon Rigotti (this volume) in applying Congruity Theory to argumentation. Argumentative processes are shown to operate both at the interpersonal level, and at the intra-personal level in soliloquy. In fact, all persuasive processes contain, in order to succeed, an element of soliloquial argumentation: to persuade through argumentation means to induce somebody else to let him/herself be convinced by the argument. Extending the notion of reflexive predicate to *connective predicates*, I interpret the individual decision making as a *sui generis* interaction between two participant roles (the arguer and the decider, i.e. the Aristotelian *kritès*) realized by the same person. The notion of connective predicate shows its usefulness also in addressing *dialogue coherence*. Two major approaches to coherence are considered. The first approach moves “from above” trying to define the *joint projects* of the participants (Clark 1996) in terms of shared *dialogue games* (Mann 2002a) or similar constructs (cf. Vanderveken 2001 and Walton 1998). Dialogue games appear necessary both as *sets of shared goals* around which coherent dialogues are hierarchically structured, and as *sets of rules* regulating participant behavior and constraining interpretation. There are, however, important differences between discourse and dialogue coherence: given the *situated* nature of dialogic interaction, its precise segmentation into the concrete moves of each participant is partly determined by the largely unpredictable moves of the other participants. Hence the relevance of the second approach addressing coherence locally and “from below” by defining the *pragmatic roles* (cf. Stati 1990) of utterances in adjacency pairs and, beyond that, the *discourse relations* holding between larger dialogue segments (Asher & Lascarides 2003; Roulet 2002). Adopting an extended notion of *strategic manoeuvring* (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, this volume) we can gain important insights on how each participant develops his own manoeuvre by pursuing his own objectives, within a shared dialogue game. An enriched version of the *connective predicate*, taking into account *individual goals* as well as the game’s *shared goals* is used to schematize how strategic manoeuvring unfolds in an argumentative dialogue.

Keywords: congruity theory, argumentation, connective predicate, monologue, dialogue.

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1. Introduction

Building upon the results of the contribution of Eddo Rigotti appearing in this same volume this paper tries to advance the same research project. It adopts the conceptual instruments offered by Congruity Theory to analyse both the semantic and pragmatic levels of discourse and applies, in particular, the notion of *connective predicate* to the analysis of argumentative discourse in monologue and dialogue. The discussion will focus on two particular aspects:

- (1) The subtle but essential link between the social, interactive process of argumentation and the individual, mental processes of decision;
- (2) The fundamental difference between dialogue coherence and the coherence of monological discourse, which is entailed by the irreducible unpredictability and novelty of the moves occurring in the ongoing dialogic interaction.

2. Arguing for oneself and for others.

The distinction drawn by Rigotti (this volume) between *dialogue* and *monologue* and, within the latter, between *monological discourse* and *soliloquy* (or reflexive discourse) mirrors certain functional differences in argumentative processes.

According to Rigotti, any act of communication can legitimately be seen as an interaction. At each level of communicative action the action of the speaker is matched by a corresponding complementary action of the addressee: in particular at the illocutionary level the expression of an illocutionary force – that is of a *connective predicate* – is matched by its *uptake* by the addressee¹. It is then legitimate to ask oneself what kind of action corresponds at the level of the *uptake* of the hearer to the act of arguing on the part of the speaker. Rigotti, in his contribution, also suggested that the uptake of a speech act by the addressee involves the *consideration* of an action proposed by the speaker: this is immediately apparent in the case of *questions*, *requests* and *orders*. This same approach can be fruitfully applied also to argumentation.

Here I want to suggest that the action proposed by an argumentation can be identified with an act of *decision* by the hearer resulting from the

¹ The picture of *uptake* presented by Rigotti (this volume) takes into account both the notion of uptake as it appears in Austin (1977) and its developments in Clark (1996) and Sbisà (2001).

evaluation of the arguments put forth by the speaker². This correspondence between argumentation and decision can help us to shed light on what could be the role of argumentation in speaking to oneself.

To argue means to try to lead somebody to assent to a proposition making it follow from arguments (reasons) he/she already accepts. It is the strength of the argument that produces this assent. In other words, once it has been set up properly, the argumentative device itself “works on its own” in a similar way in convincing oneself and in convincing others. In this respect rational persuasion and argumentation differ from other forms of influence such as fascination or seduction.

We can view rational persuasion through argumentation as the act of enabling and inducing a decision process in the addressee. We have *lato sensu* “dialogical” argumentation when the decision process operates at the interpersonal level, but all persuasive processes contain, in order to succeed, a moment of “monological” (soliloquial) argumentation: because to persuade through argumentation means to cause somebody else to let him/herself be convinced by the given argument.

We can describe a soliloquy in terms of the congruity theoretic approach (cf. Rigotti & Rocci 2001; Rocci 2003; Rocci *In press*), which Rigotti applied to argumentative moves in his contribution to this volume. Within this approach the connective predicate of a soliloquy can be represented as follows:

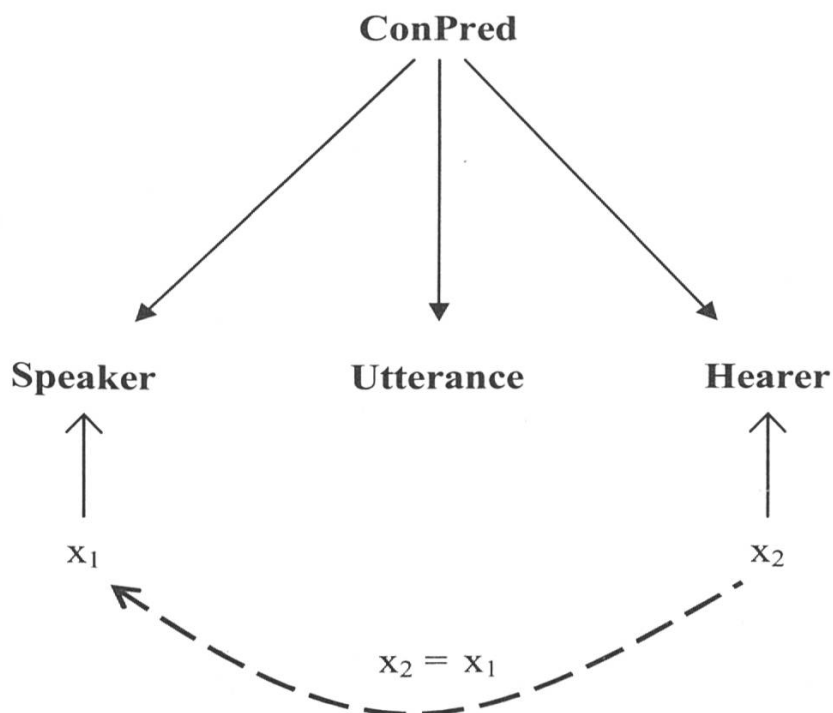


Fig. 1: The connective predicate of a soliloquy

² We find a similar focus on the action of the hearer in argumentation in Pinto (2002),

It is easy to show that the semantic structure of this connective predicate belongs to the more general class of reflexive predicates where the same entity covers two different argument places (or roles) within the predicate's argument frame³. Consider the following statement:

Poppaea Sabina, the second wife of the Emperor Nero, washed herself in the milk of female donkeys

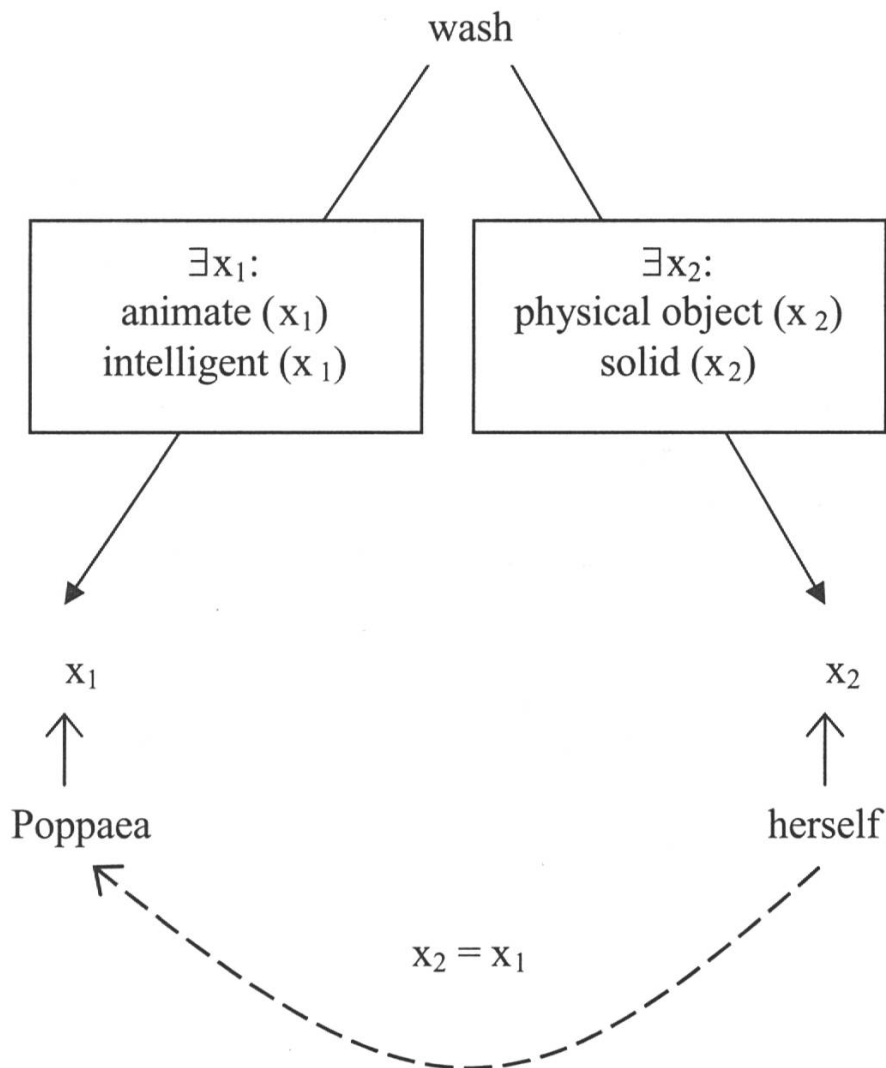


Fig. 2: Congruity-theoretic analysis of a reflexive predicate

where the arguments are treated as *invitations to inference*, and inference is analyzed not in purely logical terms, but as an *action* of the hearer.

³ On predicates assigning more than one semantic role (or “case role”) to the same entity within the predicate’s argument frame see also the classic analysis of Fillmore (2003: 151-153). A careful semantic analysis reveals that these predicates go beyond syntactic reflexives and include “implicit” reflexives such as the verbs *rise* and *arise*, analyzed by Fillmore.

The entity involved (*Poppaea Sabina*) does not occupy both places under the same respects: different aspects of the same entity are involved by the action of *washing*. In terms of congruity, different aspects of the same entity are selected by the presuppositions imposed by the predicate itself: while x_1 is an agent, a person responsible for her actions, x_2 (following the presuppositions that are imposed to it by *to wash*) is only the body of that person.

Something similar happens with the reflexive action taking place in a soliloquy. The argument x_1 has the role of the *speaker* and the argument x_2 has the role of the *addressee*. A noteworthy difference is that the communicative roles of x_1 and x_2 are, in fact, both *agentive* roles, but in a different way. The argument role x_1 is the carrier of the initiative – let us call it *intellectus activus* – and the role x_2 the more or less critical receiver (*intellectus passivus*). Schlesinger, Keren-Portnoy & Parush (2002: 180) report this interesting *dictum*, attributed to Peirce: “all thinking is dialogical in form. Your self of one instant appeals to your deeper self for his assent.”

If we adopt such a *monological* perspective in approaching individual decision, we can see the first role as the *arguer* and the second one as what Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* called the *kritès*, a word that is usually translated as *judge*:

The use of persuasive speech is to lead to decisions. (When we know a thing, and have decided about it, there is no further use in speaking about it.) This is so even if one is addressing a single person and urging him to do or not to do something, as when we scold a man for his conduct or try to change his views: the single person is as much your “judge” as if he were one of many; we may say, without qualification, that any one is your judge whom you have to persuade. Nor does it matter whether we are arguing against an actual opponent or against a mere proposition; in the latter case we still have to use speech and overthrow the opposing arguments, and we attack these as we should attack an actual opponent. Our principle holds good of ceremonial speeches also; the “onlookers” for whom such a speech is put together are treated as the judges of it. Broadly speaking, however, the only sort of person who can strictly be called a judge is the man who decides the issue in some matter of public controversy; that is, in law suits and in political debates, in both of which there are issues to be decided. (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book II Chapter 18, translated by W. Rhys Roberts).

Here the translator correctly renders the word *krísis* as *decision*. It is quite evident from the passage that *kritès* is not only a judge in court (properly *dikastès*) but, in a sense, “is anyone whom you have to persuade”. By the way, immediately after, Aristotle, consistently with the general orientation of his *Rhetoric*, restricts the proper meaning of *kritès* to those who have the responsibility to take decisions in public affairs.

The psychological consequences of interpreting individual decision making as an interaction between two argumentative roles (the arguer and the *kritès*) are not trivial and their discussion would require far more space than what is allowed in the present circumstance⁴. Here I would like to point out how such a notion of monological argument could provide an interesting perspective on the relationship between individual decision processes and argumentative processes in communicative interaction.

Let us consider the story of Sean who was sleeping on the grass in the garden and is awakened by Mary (cf. Rigotti, this volume). When Sean says to Mary,

The sun is setting. I must have slept several hours.

he is not trying to persuade her, rather he shows what has persuaded him by presenting his *monological argumentation* to her. Since in our constructed example the evidence is presented by Sean as non conclusive and Mary is in a position to know, Sean’s utterance also counts as an indirect request of confirmation. If we consider the case of Mary justifying her choices (see again Rigotti, this volume),

I am going to marry Sean. He is handsome, brilliant and incredibly rich.

we also find that the notion of *monological argumentation* turns out to be useful. Mary gives to her interlocutor *reasons* for approving her decision by explaining the *causes of her decision*. It is certainly not by chance that in English (as well as in Italian, and arguably in many other languages) a word like *reason* is used both to indicate a premise in an inferential process and the cause of an action performed by a rational agent⁵. Let us imagine Mary about to take the big step:

⁴ Within argumentation theory this question has been addressed by Pinto (2002), who develops a notion of *reason* that emphasizes the similarity between *reasons for action* and *reasons for believing*.

⁵ See again Pinto (2002) on the polysemy of *reason*.

Should I Marry Sean?

He is handsome, he is brilliant, and he is incredibly rich.

Definitely, I should marry him.

We can regard the motivations – the causes – of a rational decision as the premises of a monological (soliloquial) act of argumentation. Here, the motivations that in the dialogical argumentation were only indirectly arguments for the approval of the decision become directly arguments in a process of monological argumentation, which is, in fact, nothing but a rational process of decision making.

In concluding this short discussion of *monological argumentation* a *caveat* is necessary in order to avoid a possible misunderstanding. It is important to emphasize that the point of this discussion is not to claim that decision processes are something intrinsically verbal or linguistically based (which is probably largely false under many respects). Rather the point is to emphasize the strong, constitutive, link between the act of arguing and the act of taking a decision.

3. Coherence from text to dialogue

In the above section I have distinguished two types of argumentation: one that occurs in reflexive communicative interaction (*soliloquy*) and one that occurs in communicative interactions involving different subjects.

Texts are *coherent* sequences of utterances: that is sequences of utterances that “make sense together”, as they belong to a functional whole. Congruity Theory explains the *coherence* of texts both as a semantic and a pragmatic property. *Coherence* is to be interpreted pragmatically in terms of correspondence of each utterance or sequence to its respective goals or intended effects, as they are stated by the connective predicate of the sequence (cf. Rigotti and Rocci 2001; Wüest 2001; Rocci 2003 and Rigotti, this volume)⁶.

Let us consider a text composed by more than one utterance. The text *as a whole* is coherent if – regarded as a causal chain – it is *congruent* with its communicative goal. That is, in other words, if it is adequate to produce the intended effect on the hearer at the illocutionary level⁷. In

⁶ See also Mann & Thompson (1987), Mann, Mathiessen & Thompson (1992). For Mann, Mathiessen & Thompson (1992: 43), all the parts of a coherent text “are seen as contributing to a single purpose of the writer, i.e. as created to achieve a single effect”.

⁷ The adequacy of the utterance at the perlocutionary level depends finally on the free

Congruity Theory this *adequacy*, or *congruency*, is interpreted in terms of presuppositions that the connective predicate dominating the whole text imposes to its arguments. In a complex text, subordinate connective predicates, corresponding to subordinate goals, can appear as arguments of the connective predicate dominating the whole text. Thus, a predicate-argument hierarchy descends from the general goal of the entire text to the goal of each single utterance. These subordinate goals are communicative goals on their own: inasmuch they are intended to induce a change in the hearer, they are not purely instrumental, linguistic goals (a mere syntactic representation could not, as such, generate any communicative force).

Many researchers have claimed that we have, with respect to dialogues, intuitions of *coherence* that are similar to those we have with respect to texts. We are able to say, for example, that the utterances in (a) make sense together while those in (b) do not:

(a)

A - *Who is it?*

B - *It's the Dean's assistant.*

(b)

A - *Who is it?*

B - *Yes, I do.*

It has been suggested (Mann 2002b) that dialogue coherence has to be treated largely in the same way as the coherence of a monological text. The role of the communicative intention of the speaker, is taken up by the *joint goals* that the participants want to achieve together through the dialogue. This in account of the fact that a dialogue is not an *action*: it is an *interaction* within a certain shared setting of *joint activities* (see Clark 1996 for the notion of *joint activity*).

As shown by Rigotti (this volume), *dialogue games* define the cooperative dimension of an interaction and can be analyzed in terms of *joint goals* as well as in terms of *joint commitments* of the participants. The intentions of the interlocutors which define a dialogue game are mutually manifest to the interlocutors – are part of their *common ground* – and, at the same time, count as discursive commitments to which the participants are bound while the game is being played (Mann 2002a).

choice of the hearer and is not relevant here.

This notion of dialogue game has been given various theoretical specifications: *joint projects* (Clark 1996), *conversation games* and *behavior games* (Airenti, Bara & Colombetti 1993), *dialogue (macro-)games* Mann (1988 and 2002a), as well as the concept of a *collective higher order illocutionary act* recently introduced into Speech Act Theory by Vanderveken (2001 and 2002), and the notion of a *dialogue type* developed by Walton (1998) in argumentation theory. The proposals of Mann and Vanderveken are particularly interesting for us because they envisage sets of conditions imposed by the dialogue game on the participants and on the content of the dialogue that are homogeneous with the constitutive conditions of speech acts⁸.

There are, in fact, reasons to believe that along these lines we can extend rather naturally the notion of a connective predicate to encompass also the *dialogue games* as they share a number of important features with connective predicates. They are however considerably more abstract. We can envisage a dialogue game as a predicate imposing a number of presuppositional conditions on its arguments, which will include at least the *participants* of the dialogue⁹, the *content* of the dialogue¹⁰, and its previous *interactional context*. All the conditions will act as *discourse commitments* for the participants while the dialogue is going on.

Further research work is needed to fully substantiate the extension of Congruity Theory I am envisaging here, and certainly I cannot pretend to exhaust it within the limits of this paper. So I limit myself to give a

⁸ For Vanderveken (2001) *discourse types*, much like the basic illocutionary acts, are characterized by a number of conditions, including the *discursive goal*, the *thematic conditions* concerning the subject matter of the dialogue, and the *background conditions* consisting in a "structured set of presuppositions often related to social forms of life in the background". In Mann (2002a) *dialogue macrogames* are defined in terms of the conditions they impose on two types of intentions or goals: the joint goal and the goals of the participants, intended purely as *participatory* goals (cf. Clark 1996: 60) that is as the roles that must be played by the participants in order to achieve the joint goal. Moreover *macrogames* are characterized by a *parameter* corresponding to the subject matter of the dialogue. For example in an *information seeking* game the accepted joint goal is that the information seeker obtains the information, the role of the seeker is to specify the kind of information sought, the role of the information provider is to provide the information according to the specification, and the parameter is *a piece of information*.

⁹ In this case, rather than a *speaker* and a *hearer* role, we can distinguish, with (Mann 2002a), an *initiator* and a *respondent* role, who take the different responsibilities of *proposing* and *accepting to pursue* the joint action at issue.

¹⁰ Content conditions may concern both the general *topic* of the dialogue, and determine in part the *type* and *concatenation* of the connective predicates that are successively activated in the dialogue.

suggestive example of how this line of explanation might work. Let us consider the case of John and Mary who are *deciding on the restaurant in which they will have dinner together tonight*. This communicative interaction can be viewed as an instance of a dialogue game of the *deliberation* or collective decision making genre. Such a game will presuppose, for instance, that both participants want to act to reach an agreement on a common course of actions (condition on the participants), that the dialogue is about future actions of the participants (condition on the content), and that the participants *have already decided* to have dinner together (condition on the previous interactional context).

These dialogue games with their presuppositional conditions can be viewed from two different perspectives: firstly, as nodes around which the entire dialogue is organized, and through which its structure can be singled out in the analysis, secondly, as rules governing the production of the dialogue by the participants in the dialogic interaction¹¹.

It is intriguing, here, to envisage the construction of systems of rules that embody the conditions for various dialogue games. In fact, in relation to argumentation these rules have been already systematically identified and rigorously defined in the model of *critical discussion* within the pragma-dialectic approach (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984; 2004).

An account of dialogue coherence based on the notion of *joint goals*, such as the one sketched above, focuses on the similarities between the coherence of monologues and the coherence of dialogues, taking for granted an essential continuity between individual speech acts and collective speech acts, between monological connective predicates and dialogue game predicates. From some of the authors cited above one even gets the

¹¹ With respect to an analysis of verbal interactions in terms of dialogue games an important question arises: how much can such a view of interactions be claimed to be a description (or explanation) of what is going on (which is the stance usually adopted by linguists and discourse analysts) or a normative view of what a certain type of interaction should be in view of certain criteria of rationality (which is the stance generally adopted by argumentation theorists)? We think that there are good reasons to believe that dialogue games play, within certain limits, both the roles of descriptive and normative concepts. A dialogue game on the one side is a norm, an ideal, on the other is a norm that up to a certain extent is actually used by the dialogue participants to interpret, to make sense of the dialogue. At the same time a dialogue game is an ideal to which the participants commit themselves more or less explicitly also through the realization of specific meta-acts (Mann 2002a). We can thus speak of an *internal ideal model*, an ideal model which is interiorized by the participants themselves. The limits of such an internal ideal model of dialogues can be measured along three independent dimensions: the implicitness of the commitments, their vagueness and their complexity.

impression that there is not really much of a difference, at this level, between the coherence of monologue and the coherence of dialogue.

There are however two quite basic differences between a monological discourse and a dialogue, which impact deeply on the nature of coherence. The first difference is *semantic* as it concerns the text-to-world correlation: while monologic, one-speaker, discourses refer to a unique world (the world, or universe¹², of the speaker), dialogues present as many worlds as there are participants and these worlds can be compatible, as well as incompatible, that is reciprocally contradictory¹³. Monologic discourse, on the contrary, is expected to preserve the property of consistency¹⁴.

In order to identify the second, *pragmatic*, difference we must consider some very basic facts about the nature of action and interaction. As observed by Clark (1996) and other scholars, appropriate joint goals are taken up by dialogue participants in order to advance joint activities – such as, for instance, a commercial transaction. Clark (1996: 33) characterizes *activity goals* as follows:

People participate in joint activities to achieve certain dominant goals. In many activities, one person initiates the joint activity with a dominant goal in mind, and the others join him or her in order to achieve it.

This picture of human activity, while by no means incorrect, is however incomplete and risks, in my opinion, to be misleading. Let us see why. We speak of action and not simply of event when an agent, attracted by the hypothesis of a state of affairs corresponding to some of her/his goals (desires, dreams, ideals, needs, etc., in other words: something positive

¹² In terms of possible worlds the universe of the speaker, to which the text refers, consists in a whole set of worlds – facts, hypotheses, ideals, desires, rules – connected by the appropriate accessibility relations. More precisely what we get is partial information on a set of worlds; which gives rise to a set of alternative sets of worlds.

¹³ In their formal semantic approach to dialogue, Asher & Lascarides (2003) address systematically the possibility of contradictions arising in the dialogue and introduce a semantic notion of *dispute* to model the dynamic update of information in the course of a dialogue. A *dispute*, in the technical semantic sense, arises in a dialogue when a discourse relation – which is roughly the equivalent of a connective predicate – connects two utterances with incompatible truth conditions and negates or renders dubious the contents of one of them (ex. A: *John distributed the copies.* B: *No, Sue distributed the copies!*). These relations, which are called *divergent*, are considered to be exclusively dialogic.

¹⁴ *Soliloquy* is closer, for this and other aspects, to a dialogue than to a *monologic discourse*: inconsistencies are indeed admitted in it each time internal conflicts of opinion and contrasts of experience interpretation take place. Inconsistencies are also admitted in monologic discourse when a soliloquy is simulated or a dialogue is represented.

attracting the agent¹⁵) activates a causal chain that is expected to realize this state of affairs (Rigotti 2003; Rigotti in press). Generally speaking, a joint action can take place when an agent is not able or does not want to pursue his/her own goal him/herself and negotiates with other people their engagement in the causal chain. Two different scenarios of joint action can be envisaged:

- (1) *Both agents aim together at the same goal.* In this case we can speak of cooperation: one single action with two co-agents (when, for example, two agents cooperate in helping an injured person);
- (2) *Each agent pursues his/her goal by realising the goal of the other.* We properly speak in this case of inter-action. Both inter-agents, having different goals, leave the realisation of their respective goals to the action of the other, relying on each other for the satisfaction of their desires.

It is typical of interactions that the *shared goals* of the joint activity do not exhaust *the goals that motivate the inter-agents*. They are not the goals that motivate them to enter the interaction. Let us take the activity frame *commercial transaction*: both the buyer and the seller have the goal of felicitously completing the transaction and will take the appropriate steps to do so. However they do not normally enter the transaction for this goal (*Great! I really wanted to have a smooth commercial transaction such as this. The shop clerk was really helpful and polite!*). The main goals that motivate them to enter the transaction are quite dissimilar for the buyer and the seller. To put it simply: the first *wants to obtain the goods*, the other *wants to obtain the money*. These are very different goals. As a tendency, within interaction, the goal of fulfilling in the due manner the particular activity frame is rather instrumental and therefore subordinate to the individual goal.

In the case of the commercial transaction the goals of the *inter-agents* can be said to be partially *complementary*. There are many interactions where the goals are more markedly divergent and potentially conflicting (a variable amount of conflict is present in the commercial transaction as well). But individual goals can also play an important role in interactions

¹⁵ Bange (1992:207) founds his theory of conversational interaction on a concept of action defined as follows “un comportement d’un individu dans une situation donnée est une action lorsqu’il peut être interprété selon une intention en vue de la réalisation d’un but qui lui donne un sens”.

that are basically cooperative: John and Mary, for instance, while sharing the goal of finding a restaurant to have dinner together in Lugano, may have divergent personal preferences: Mary finds Japanese food healthy and satisfying, while John would rather opt for a risotto in a traditional Ticinese *grotto*. The pursuit of individual goals of this kind *within* the frame of the accepted joint goals that characterize a dialogue game plays an important role in determining the shape of the dialogue itself.

Up to here I have been considering, on one hand, the coherence of dialogue proper from the viewpoint of its dominant goal, which coincides with the goal that is shared by all participants in a dialogic interaction. Here the conceptual construct of *dialogue game* plays a key role in eliciting the semantic and pragmatic organisation of a dialogue. But we have found, on the other hand, significant evidence that the theoretical construct of dialogue game does not suffice to deduce (or generate) the dialogue moves, simply because, aside the shared goals (and, often, above them), there are the individual, unpredictable, goals, which are decisive for the definition of the concrete moves occurring along a dialogic interaction. For argumentative interactions, the pragma-dialectic approach addresses this tension between institutionalized goals and private goals through the concept of a *strategic maneuvering* aimed at reaching persuasive goals while satisfying the commitment to a critical discussion (cf. Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, this volume).

It is not reasonable then to imagine the construction of global connective predicates that pre-define or generate the actual semantic structure of a dialogue all the way down to the succession of moves by the different participants. While *connective predicates* governing monological texts and *dialogue game predicates* manifest strong similarities, they are not one and the same thing.

It seems, on the contrary, that the fine representation of the actual semantic-pragmatic structure of a dialogue is better captured by a more “horizontal” approach, moving from the construction of connective predicates for the individual dialogical moves as they emerge from the individual goals and intentions of the speakers and from the uptake of the moves of the other speakers. It is natural here to start from the study of the “adjacency pairs” singled out by conversation analysts (Schegloff & Sacks 1973) such as *Question-Answer*, *Request-Promise*, *Assertion-Assent*, etc. In fact, interesting work has been conducted to reinterpret these pairs, in terms of discourse relations or, more generally, predicative structures. This line of research has been developed in particular in computa-

tional linguistics¹⁶, but it was already present in discourse analysis¹⁷. Recently, Asher and his associates have been developing this line of research with a semantic focus on the truth-conditional consequences of speech-acts combining a commitment to formal rigour with a descriptively rich taxonomy of dialogic discourse relations (Asher & Lascarides 2003, Asher, Busquets & Le Draoulec 2001).

Finally, in the field of Argumentation Theory, Sorin Stati (1990 & 2002) deserves in this perspective a particular mention for developing a fine typology of dialogical and monological *argumentative roles*¹⁸ and applying it to the analysis of the local structure of argumentation in literary and theatrical dialogues.

The hypothesis we are currently pursuing in applying Congruity Theory to dialogue tries to explain how the respect of the conditions imposed by the dialogue games and the congruity of the local moves with the adjacent moves of the other participants both play a role in determining what we call dialogue coherence. A simple example will help us to sketch this hypothesis.

¹⁶ See, for instance, the interesting contributions of Carberry, Chu, Green & Lambert (1993), Stent (2000), Redeker (2000) and Taboada (2004).

¹⁷ A well developed example is the treatment of discourse relations in the Geneva Model of discourse analysis (Roulet 1999, Roulet et al. 2000, Roulet 2002) and in particular the role of the *illocutionary relations*, which characterize the pragmatic function of a dialogue move with respect to the moves of other participants in a dialogue. These relations can be initiative (*interrogation, assertion, intimation*) or reactive (*réponse* and *rati-fication*) depending on their positioning in the structure of the dialogic exchange and can take scope not only over elementary utterances but also over moves characterized by a complex internal structure, which, for Roulet can be understood – at least in part – in terms of the monological relations holding between their constitutive elementary discourse acts (the so-called *relations inter-actives*).

¹⁸ According to Sorin Stati (2002: 30), an *argumentative role* is the *function* that an utterance acquires in the framework of a (monologic or dialogic) argumentative discourse. For instance, the utterance: “John is coming back tomorrow” may be a *Thesis* (a claim) in some circumstances, e.g. if the speaker adds “He has to go to work tomorrow!” as a justification of his first statement; but the same utterance may be also an *Objection*, if it is uttered as a negative reaction to the interlocutor’s utterance: “John is staying abroad for the next three months”. Here, from the point of view of relevance, it is useful to introduce the notion of *target (bersaglio)*: we use the target utterance to assign an argumentative role to other utterances. For instance, in the first exemplified considered above, “John is coming back tomorrow” was the target of the following utterance: “He has to go to work!”. In fact, this utterance is interpreted as a justification only by virtue of its relation to the target. According to Stati, the argumentative roles can be classified into *roles of support*, used to support a certain thesis, and *polemic roles*, which are dialogic by nature, and can be considered verbal reactions to a certain thesis put forward by an interlocutor. Some significant supporting roles are: *Assent, Justification, Proof, Example, Analogy*, etc; some polemic roles are *Disagree (Refusal), Objection, Criticism*, etc.

Let us imagine that, within a court debate, one of the parties makes a rather trivial grammatical mistake. Here, a critical remark of the opposite party, such as

I observe that our counterpart has some difficulties with grammar

shows a certain degree of congruity (relevance) at the local level¹⁹, but could be easily rejected as incongruous (irrelevant) at the level of the institutionalized dialogue game that governs this particular interaction²⁰.

¹⁹ Let us explain why we say that, at the local level, the move shows “a certain degree of congruity” and not just that it is fully congruous. The connective predicate of the move takes the counterpart’s utterance (U_{-1}) – not its content, but the very fact it was uttered, jointly with its form – as a premise for the *inference* drawn by U_0 . Granted that there was indeed a grammatical error in U_{-1} , we can say that there is congruity between the actual argument U_{-1} and the argument role the connective predicate assigns to it and that the *inference* was correctly drawn. We cannot say, however, that the move is *fully* congruous with respect of U_{-1} , because U_0 does not represent a relevant *uptake* of U_{-1} as it happens for proper adjacency pairs (cf. Clark 1996: 196-201). For instance, the counterpart’s utterance can hardly be construed as *a claim about grammar* to which the speaker can congruously *object* with U_0 . In sum, we can say that U_0 is congruous as an *inference*, but it is not congruous if construed as an *objection* to U_{-1} or as any kind of uptake of U_{-1} . These remarks bring to light the fact that there are different levels of congruity and that it is not easy to define criteria for establishing the congruence *in general* of a particular move. For instance, there are cases where a move can be congruent with respect to the overall dialogue game without taking up any other participants’ move (e.g. *It’s a real shame that the eloquent speech of my counterpart has just unwittingly contradicted his client’s alibi.*). It’s clear that the relationship between uptake and the congruity of a dialogical connective predicate is a complex matter which needs to be further explored.

²⁰ We consider indeed relevance, coherence and congruity (see also above) as essentially synonymous. Dascal (2003 : 33) distinguishes semantic relevance, which “concerns the relevance of certain linguistic, logic, or cognitive entities, say, ‘propositions’, to other entities of the same type”, from pragmatic relevance, which “has to do with the relevance of speech acts to certain goals; its characterisation may thus be viewed as a specialization of the general notion of relevance of an action to a goal which is an essential piece of the much desired ‘general theory of action’”. If we consider, for instance, a simple communicative interaction, in which A asks B a question, and B reacts, when can we say that B’s reaction is relevant on a local (semantic) level? B’s reaction is relevant if it is a *possible answer* to A’s question; if, in other words, it meets the condition of answering A’s question. Not by chance the connective predicate of B’s answer includes A’s question among its argument-places. Relevance appears, thus, to be reducible to the notion of *congruity*. The same is true for relevance to the dialogue game in which participants are engaged: a certain move can be said to be relevant if congruity is respected with the conditions imposed by the predicate corresponding to the dialogue game. Other approaches are more explicitly close to ours as they point out the relation between rel-

At the same time, we could imagine that our speaker, by introducing this critical remark, pursues his individual goal of lowering the credibility of his counterpart before the judge by activating an enthymematic inferential mechanism aimed at discrediting his/her cultural image.

I have already said that the presence of different (and often incompatible) individual goals, which characterizes all dialogic interaction, excludes the possibility of reconstructing a hierarchical structure of connective predicates for a dialogue. However it should be noted that, in fact, it also excludes that we can generate the *dialogue strategy* of one participant as an exhaustive planning descending from the conjunction of the individual and shared goals. Yet, we can somehow represent the dialogue strategy of each participant in terms of *situated action* (Mantovani 1995: 17-71), i.e. as a complex action that is not exhaustively planned once for all in its concrete segmentation into simpler actions, but whose precise segmentation into simpler actions is partly determined by unpredictable and unexpected conditions empirically emerging from the context. In a situated action, the agent adapts his/her performance taking into account the limits but also the affordances emerging from the developing context. In our case, the partially unknown context consists of the ongoing, largely unpredictable, interventions of other participants.

At this point, the notion of *strategic manoeuvring* mentioned above turns out to be a kernel conceptual instrument of dialogue analysis, as it shows its general adaptability, beyond the specifics of argumentation, to any dialogue game, to explain how each participant develops his own manoeuvre by pursuing his own objectives, in the framework of an agreed upon dialogue game.

The manoeuvre (SM) realized in the move I have imagined above could receive the following congruity-theoretic representation:

evance and textual coherence. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2003: 69-94), for instance, analyze various approaches to relevance, and notice that the concept of *coherence* is “the overarching perspective that links the various approaches to relevance with one another”. They provide a model of relevance in the argumentative discourse, where the main question is “when exactly can we say that certain parts of a discourse or text are *functionally connected* with other parts of the discourse or text?”. I indeed consider local and hierarchical congruity as an adequate condition for a *functional connection*.

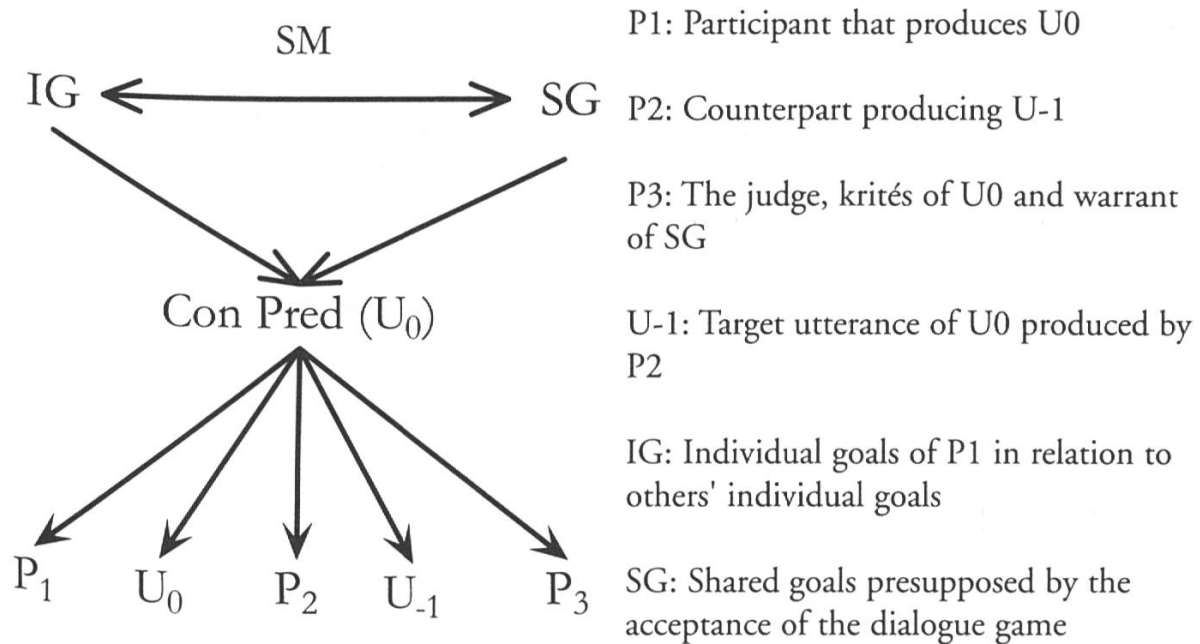


Fig. 3: Strategic manoeuvring in congruity-theoretic terms

The manoeuvre considered in our example, because of its irrelevance with respect to the dialogue game, is, however, subject to a risk. If the judge P_3 detects the irrelevance of emphasizing a grammatical mistake within a trial in court, he/she will be authorized to infer – through some form of symptomatic argument – a manipulative intention in P_1 , and be, in the end, negatively biased.

But, here, we would need to recur to another complex representation to render the secret inferential move occurring within the soliloquy of P_3 .

4. Some conclusive remarks

At this point it seems appropriate to take stock of the acquisitions of the ongoing research presented here and in Rigotti's contribution to this volume, listing also the approximately drawn solutions, which need to be further specified, and, finally, the many questions that still remain unanswered.

The principle of congruity appeared to be quite useful in explaining coherence and other related properties such as meaningfulness and relevance (both at a local and at a global level). This principle enables us to treat uniformly properties, relations and logical connectives in semantics, as well as speech acts, discourse relations and dialogue games in pragmatics, all in terms of *predicates*, that is, of *possible modes of being*. It seems, by the way, possible to define, precisely enough, the difference between

semantic and pragmatic predicates, considering the former as *represented modes of being*, and the latter as *realized modes of being*. In the latter case, these modes of being are, of course, communicative actions²¹.

An important effort in this work has been devoted to reconsider, from the point of view of congruity, the apparently familiar distinction between *monologue* and *dialogue*. And it became clear that the two categories are indeed fuzzy, and need further specification. Within the monologue, *monological discourse* proper – understood as a one-speaker discourse addressed to others – has been thus distinguished from *reflexive discourse*, or *soliloquy*.

Soliloquy was found to be understandable in terms of congruity as a *reflexive predicate structure*. From the point of view of argumentation, soliloquy appears as the human activity in which – so to speak – one works for persuading oneself, that is, the activity in which *decision* takes place.

With respect to their predicate-argument organization, *monological discourse* and *dialogue* show some analogies and differences. For monological discourses – referred to by a large tradition simply as *texts* – we already have at our disposal some well established theoretical approaches that explain their organization in terms of a semantic and/or a pragmatic hierarchy. For dialogues, a number of influential proposals seem to emphasize – by introducing the notion of a *dialogue game* – a strong similarity with texts, as if dialogues were to be considered as a sort of many-voices texts. Now, while some dialogues manifest a dependence on strongly institutionalized dialogue games – one could almost speak of rituals – others appear to be rather weakly structured. A sort of gradient of *dialogue game normativity* could be established going from ritualized verbal exchanges to informal conversations. The degree of normativity vs openness of a given dialogue game seem to be also correlated with the presence and weight of individual goals that cannot be simply deduced from the dialogue game itself.

Here, two notions appeared to be particularly helpful: the activity of the participants in a dialogic game turned out to be a typical *situated action*, and the notion of *strategic maneuvering* appeared to be generalizable from argumentation to all dialogue games.

Despite the effort devoted by the participants in this research, the journey is far from being concluded and much is still to be done. In particular it is necessary:

²¹ And, as actions, they are a subtype of states of affairs (that is of modes of being or predicate-arguments structures).

1. to construct a typology of argumentative connective predicates²²;
2. to shed more light on the specific nature of dialogical connective predicates in relation to monological connective predicates²³;
3. to specify the different types of dialogic argumentative connective predicates and the general conditions for their felicitous occurrence within specific socially relevant dialogue games;
4. finally, to investigate the creative potential of dialogic interaction in terms of relational and cognitive benefits (a topic which is particularly relevant for communication sciences).

A sincere promise of continuing the research seems therefore more appropriate than an attempt at drawing conclusions.

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²² It is rather obvious that such a typology should largely coincide with a taxonomy of arguments, almost a new form of *Topics*.

²³ Here, the property of meta-discursivity appears to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for dialogic connective predicates. In fact even a polemic, "divergent", connective predicate can be "recycled" as a connective predicate signaling radical changes of attitude in a soliloquy.

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