DISCOURSE FUNCTIONAL RELATIONS REVISITED: MASTERING
CAUSATIVITY AS MEANS OF COMMUNICATIVE IMPACT

Evgeniya V. Ponomarenko
Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University) of the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs of Russia (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The present work is aimed at disclosing the rhetoric value of verbal means of expressing causativity
(or causality/causation) and their significance for teaching students of English to enhance discourse
communicative efficiency. The object of investigation is seen through the prism of discourse functional
relations as defined by T. van Dijk back in 1981, i.e. the specific semantic role/function of utterances in
respect to each other, which is based on semantic links between propositions and on relations
between the described facts and their properties in ‘possible worlds’. In terms of functional linguistics
such interactions of utterances are more precisely qualified as pragmasemantic relations.

The paper gives ground for the premise that studying functional (pragmasemantic) relations in
discourse is a topical aspect of language training, especially for the sake of developing students’
analytical, systemic and communicative competences. In this respect, causative relations are of
primary importance, since it is this semantic interaction that is universal for any type of discourse, and
builds up the proper logic of both mental operations and their verbal actualisation. Methods of the
functional analysis used in the research prove to fit well for exposing these processes as reflected in
English fiction.

The author comes to certain conclusions which have to be taken into account in classroom
techniques. Firstly, causativity makes the foundation of discourse sense integrity, systemacy and
cohesion. Secondly, causative relations may be verbalised either explicitly or implicitly. While explicit
verbal means are semantically quite unilateral, implicit expression of causativity is usually enriched
with complementary pragmasemantic meanings. The latter case deserves special attention at English
lessons as mastering such linguistic devices people become more efficient in achieving their
communicative purposes. Thirdly, the causative utterances acquire different functional loading
depending not only on the selected language units expressing causative meaning, but also on the
order of the components placement (whether the cause precedes or follows the consequence).

With all this in mind, students come to understand that manipulating discourse units which form
causative relations, they can transform the cumulative sense of speech into the framework that best
contributes to the overall communicative impact on the partner. Such skills are of significant
importance when they are directed at harmonising communication, especially in situations of
compromise search, disputes or discrepancies.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, functional linguistics, discourse analysis, functional
relations, causativity, teaching methods, communicative impact.

1 INTRODUCTION

Today linguistic education for all kinds of professionals is no longer satisfied with good command of
English (or any other language, for that matter), as reasonable people understand very well the
potential might of the word in influencing our minds. Communication is not only about exchanging
information, but it is about instilling certain ideas, stimulating certain reactions, forming certain
competences and, generally, shaping human worldview, sometimes up to brainwashing [1], [2], [3].
Therefore linguistic research works, including fundamentally profound ones, are always practically
valid, as they give the clue to the ways rhetorical impact is made on communicants and, generally,
public mindset. In other words, they disclose processes of rooting these or those meanings in our
minds and emotions in our souls, which are effects of critical importance for both an individual and
society.

In this respect one of the indispensable aspects of linguistic education present functional relations
between components of discourse. But before we actually start discussing them, it is necessary to
determine which type of correlation is qualified as functional relations. The proper definition of
Functional relations were given by T.A. van Dijk. In his *Studies in the Pragmatics of Discourse* back in 1981, T.A. van Dijk characterised them as the specific semantic role/function of utterances in respect to each other, which is based on semantic links between propositions and on relations between the described facts and their properties in ‘possible worlds’ [4: 270]. In terms of functional linguistics such interactions of utterances are more precisely determined as pragmasemantic relations, following the general assumption that semantic properties of language units are the elements of meaning which are paradigmatically inherent in them, while pragmatic properties are those which are actualized in direct communication, i.e. in the appropriate context and between certain communicants [5], [6], [7]. According to G. Yule, “The advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that one can talk about people’s intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes and goals <…>” [8]. Taken together, these postulates lead to the inference that functional relations are defined as pragmasemantic ones, i.e. semantic relations enriched by pragmatic features that complement them in concrete speech acts.

With this in mind scholars and educationalists set the goal of putting such theoretical knowledge at the service of elaborating young specialists’ communicative competence, especially with those professionals whose work is connected with institutional communication, like business, politics, diplomacy and others [9], [10]. Within the general range of functional relations causative ones are of primary importance, since it is this semantic interaction which is universal for any type of discourse, and builds up the proper logic of both mental operations and their verbal actualization. Thus, the present work is aimed at revealing the rhetoric value of verbal means expressing causativity (causality/causation) and their significance for teaching students of English to enhance discourse communicative efficiency.

2 METHODOLOGY

We proceed from the fact that semantic classification is actually a conceptual classification based on the sign, on expressing concepts in a certain, viz. linguistic, sign system. Therefore, in analyzing the functional relations between various components of English discourse, it is necessary to take into account such characteristics as content-semantic relationship between utterances and the facts described, the type of their grammatical expression, structural units that are most typical of this or other type of semantic relation, their common or, conversely, different features in their approach to a pragmatic assessment of a phenomenon being characterized by partners of communication, etc.

In order to reveal the connections between speech and mental activity, methods of functional linguistics prove to be efficient, since functional linguistics is aimed at disclosing the purposes and functions of language units, their pragmatic loading and effect on people’s feelings and opinions; it explains the language ‘life’ proceeding from meaning and function to form [11], [12], [13]. Putting it more precisely, the functional analysis identifies components of meaning, determines their place in the general sense of the utterance or discourse, singles out language units and their combinations that bear these semantic components and explicates their correlations with pragmatic accretions that complete the overall picture of discourse sense space.

The combination of such analytical operations reveals functional synergism of speech directed towards the communicative purport of the speaker or writer and resulting in the well known synergistic effect of “two and two making 5” (“2+2=5”).

The present research of causative functional relations is based on the above algorithm of analysis which has proved efficient in both theoretical and practical approaches to language study, especially for the sake of developing students’ analytical, systemic and communicative competences.

3 RESULTS

Semantic and pragmatic issues by right have always figured prominently in linguistics. The unquenchable interest in semantics is explained by the fact that, to use A. Wierzbicka’s fortuitous expression, its key objective is to prepare “an alphabet of human thought” or to make out the so-called semantic primitives [14]. This statement is conditional since it seems doubtful that the outstanding scholar implied schematising the process, forms and result of thinking to such an extent as to fit them into a limited set of elements. But the core of A. Wierzbicka’s thought is conveyed faithfully and it resonates with the well-known analogous statement by G. W. Leibniz.

Linguists have long determined that everything in every given state of language rests on relations. In this regard, as indicated earlier, semantic relations between utterances are an optimal criterion that
makes it possible to study the nature of the functional field of discourse in sufficient depth. The possibility of verbal communication is conditioned by the fact that (pragma)semantic relations are rather constant and uniformly understandable for speakers of different languages.

3.1 Definition of Causation and Circular-Causal Relationship

The relations of causation, or cause and effect, are one of the most essential types of universal interrelationship between different phenomena. According to The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, “causation is the relation between two events that holds when, given that one occurs, it produces, or brings forth, or determines, or necessitates the second; equally we say that once the first has happened the second must happen or that the second follows on from the first” [15]. That means that a cause is a phenomenon that is bound to generate another phenomenon, i.e. its effect.

In science, there is a broad and narrow understanding of cause-effect relationship. The broad (philosophical) understanding of causation (causativity), whereof the main criterion is formulated in the above quote, is revealed in a number of immanent attributes of this phenomenon, viz. generability, necessity, unambiguity, immediacy. In the course of linguistic research, there is no need to cover these aspects in detail, it will suffice to take into account their part in the phenomena of English discourse that are of interest to linguists.

Since discourse (like language as a whole) is recognised to be a complex open-ended and self-organising system [13], [16] and, therefore, possess the basic properties of such systems, it undoubtedly realises such a property as a circular-causal relationship. The principle of circular-causal relationship assumes, on the one hand, the system’s effect on its parts and elements, and, on the other hand, a joint effect of its elements and parts on the functioning of the system as a whole. And in doing so it contributes to the establishment of order parameters that correspond to the system’s tendencies. By acting from both “above” and “below”, the circular-causal relationship produces certain effects that ensure a dynamic, movable functional equilibrium in a system that makes it stable and enhances its survivability. Therefore, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the causal relationship.

In relation to the issues of English linguistics, the cause-effect relationship is understood in a more specific way – as a semantic and structural interaction between speech constructs expressing the cause of a phenomenon and the effects it causes.

e.g. [At last the case came to trial.] Green Rescue lost, and that was not surprising. Mattiece had spent millions of dollars and had the best lawyers in the country (J. Grisham).

Mme. Agoropoulos is no end afraid of them. She says that every now and then they descend from Tivoli and intrigue some bill through the Senate, or some appointment in the Church, or drive some poor lady out of Rome (Th. Wilder).

3.2 Structural Models of Causal Relationship in Discourse

In terms of general notions and meaning, i.e. when applied to the existing world order, the universal nature of cause-effect relations does not require any proof. As for speech realisation, the versatile nature of this relationship is emphasised by the fact that it is revealed bi-directionally. Researchers note that cause and effect form a two-unity cause-effect relationship. Therefore, causality can be verbalized in a linear way according to both models, cause-effect and effect-cause.

In the former model, the sequence of judgments reflects the objective nature of causal relations: first a causative factor is formed (generated), and then it produces some effect.

Yes, he was very tired. The sea and perfect peace – that was what he needed (A. Christie).

After all, I am an Oriental. I can carry a certain barbaric magnificence (W.S. Maugham).

The theatre is at its most entertaining, I think, when it stimulates by disturbing and questioning. It then has the possibility of making people’s lives richer, whether on a personal or a social level (Outlook: Artists Talking).

In case causal discourse is formed according to the effect-cause model, the objective course of developments in a situation is not reflected in real sequence for it turns out be broken. The fact that an effect may be more (and earlier) evident does not change the essence of the matter: objectively it will not arise until after the cause. It is another matter that the cause or causes of what is happening may be realized or, shall we say, evaluated after the resulting effect becomes manifest. In this case, the
postposition of the cause utterance makes causal discourse either more persuasive (1), or more
dramatic (2), or serves to accentuate the fact of the effect as being of uttermost importance at this
particular moment of the communication (3).

(1) I was enjoying myself now. I had taken two finger-bowls of champagne, and the scene had
changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound (F.S. Fitzgerald).

(2) Why did you not report his death until after the police had found the body? Do you think you can
save the guilty by manufacturing evidence against the innocent? (D. Hammett).

(3) I love to see you at my table, Nick. You remind me of a – of a rose (F.S. Fitzgerald).

3.3 Linguistic Markers of Causal Relationship

The characteristic markers of causal relation in the surface structure of English discourse are, first of
all, causal syntetic means. The verbalisers of cause-effect correlations include, among others, that is
why, which is why, so, consequently, therefore, etc. (the following examples (1)), and those of effect-
cause correlation are because, as, for (examples (2)), etc.:

(1) I suppose they must have been telling a lot of lies in those scenes. That's why that man was so
angry – the husband, I mean (J.B. Priestley).

Well, they say he's a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's. That's where all his money comes from
(F.S. Fitzgerald).

A complete Christian world view at first appears to be radical, fanatical and socially unacceptable in
our secularized society. Consequently, anyone who approaches a marriage ministry intending to
show how his Lordship affects each area of life, is probably seen to be out of step with the times
(D.&J. Ames).

No one but Elinor Carlisle could have killed Mary Gerrard. Therefore they have had to search about
for a possible motive (A. Christie).

(2) If I was responsible for all that, then it's your fault really, Gordon. Because you're responsible for
everything that happened to me (J.B. Priestley).

The ground sloped sharply up to yet another bluff some hundred yards above them. For these were
the huge subsident 'steps' that could be glimpsed from the Cobb two miles away (J. Fowles).

The most discrete case of actualising the relationship of causation is observed when answering the
Why-question, when the functional and semantic relationship between the question and the answer is
explicated as much as possible and, of course, is self-obvious regardless of its contextual
environment:

• “Why did you use that tone of voice to Betty?”
• “Perhaps – because I think that Betty has not a very high opinion of me – and so need not have
sounded so surprised and shocked” (J.B. Priestly).
• “Why did you hire Frisco after I told you not to?”
• “There was no one else” (M. Osborne).
• “Why didn’t you call up the hangar?”
• “Everybody had gone home” (J. Dos Passos).

As mentioned above, connectors of relevant semantics normally form the core formants in the
functional and semantic load of this or that type. However, available discrete means of the causal
relationship do not require the formation of cause-effect relations in the English language. Just as with
other types of discursive connections, causation is fully capable of being actualised through the lexical
and semantic relationship between correlating phrases. This relation makes explicit the syntagmatic
potential of the causal semantics in various speech constructions:

In the carriage it was cold. We sat in our overcoats meditating... (Th. Wilder).

His eye-balls ached. Driving west you were driving against the sun (A. Christie).

The light beside her was on. She was frightened of the dark (A. Christie).

It is not difficult for communicants to deduce respective verbalisers in their minds: in the first example
one could use the conjunction so or the conjunctional phrase that's why, etc.; or because or its equivalents in the second and third examples.

3.4 Condition as Part of Causativity

So far we have been talking about the category of cause-effect relationship and the nature of discursive means of its expression. But we consider it necessary to highlight another related functional category – that of condition, the language realization of which also refers to the sphere of causal discursive relationship.

The fact is that the question of delineating the concepts of cause and condition has long been controversial. The history of science is known to have gone at different times through the theories of monocausalism (according to which, cause is the only thing that affects another), and the theories of conditionalism (absolutisation of the significance of conditions, the actual rejection of the concept of cause) and those of determinism (asserting that cause is an activity prevailing over conditions), etc.

The traditional philosophical interpretation of the problem of correlation between cause and conditions generally boils down to the following: a set of factors (conditions) that are necessary for any effect to emerge includes passive factors or conditions proper, and active factors or causes; cause is one of indispensable conditions, but this is such a factor that generates effect whereas condition implies that a new phenomenon may arise.

Thus, it can be concluded that there exists an organic connection between the condition category and causal relations (including one in English discourse). The most characteristic means of expressing condition in the English language is, first and foremost, the conjunction if and its equivalents in case, provided, given, etc. Usually the condition-effect relationship is embodied within the framework of one complex (if-clause) sentence. But the cases of "independent" formulation of condition in one separate utterance and that of effect in another can also be not infrequently found in English texts.

["Your wife?"]

"She's flying to Paris on Friday. If my daughter's over the worst" (J. Fowles).

There is quite a wide spectrum of functional and pragmatic loading of causation observed in English language literature. Thus, in the examples below, the following pragmatic values are realized: generating factor (1), argument (2), basis (3), explanation (4), supposition (5) and regret (6):

(1) The sea hasn't gone down yet, terrific swell on! They won't be able to get a boat near the island before tomorrow (A. Christie).

(2) They had a lot of clients in the south. So he moved down to Memphis (J. Grisham).

(3) He wasn't here when I came up from the cottage this morning. His bed wasn't slept in (M. Spark).

(4) [I'm taking a plane for Detroit now.] I'm leaving in ten minutes. My mother's had a stroke and the doctors are being gloomy (I. Shaw).

(5) “Why did you come up here tonight?”

“Maybe because we've known each other a long time” (I. Shaw).

(6) You are a very remarkable person, Miss Woodruff. I feel deeply ashamed not to have perceived it earlier (J. Fowles).

The spread of pragmatic functions of causation is a natural effect of the universal nature of this relationship. It is no coincidence that linguists qualify causal relationship as an integral principle of complete text creation and existence as they consider the attribute of its lexical-syntactic expression/non-expression as a criterion for the logical and semantic division of texts (narrative, description and reasoning).

3.5 Causative Functional Relations as Practical Tips

The above characteristic systematises typical properties of discursive components in their causative semantic interaction – properties enabling us to identify the variety of interphrasal bonds and to comprehend the functional potential of the supraphrasal unity.

However, as has been repeatedly emphasized, to assess in a complete and reliable way the functional qualities of speech tools used and the overall (under)system of discourse by accessing a broader
context and reaching the level of the communicative block. At this level, the English language displays an amazing ability for multidimensional functional relationships, and that is why English-language literature provides numerous examples of this kind.

At the same time, the analyses of mini-blocks that include two or three utterances make it possible to reveal an extreme flexibility of the English discourse system which through the syncretism of semantic relations, allows for the expression of a multitude of different nuances on the functional plane. Thus, one can observe in the following fragments the combination of functional attributes characteristic of the following semantic relations: sequence + causation (1), causation + partitivity (2), causation + switching (3), causation + explication (4), concretization + causation + decoding (5) and others:

1. The telephone rang. She lifted the receiver (M. Spark).
2. On the bookshelves were works of reference, books on farming, gardening, fishing, and shooting, and books on the last war, in which he had won an M.C. and a D.S.O. For before his marriage he had been in the Welsh Guards (W.S. Maugham).
3. How long does this go on? Because I've something else to do (J.B. Priestley).
4. You're entirely wrong. My novel is not in the least like that (A. Huxley).
5. The Mouse was more reserved about her family. She was an only child, it seemed; her father owned and ran a small engineering works at Swindon (J. Fowles).

Building up a sentence or whole text functional perspective in an optimal way does require understanding of which kind of pragmasemantic pattern the speaker creates in discourse and what attitudes and reactions from the partner it may hypothetically ensue. Depending on the speakers' communicative intentions they may drive to the foreground the desirable semantic elements (those activating discourse movement to the purport) or disguise the unfavourable ones (those impeding achievement of the purport); give the partner an explanation that will instigate enthusiasm and hope, or put him/her on their alert and keep them from ill-considered actions; outline the recipient’s view of the situation as demanding a compromise or making confrontation inevitable, etc., etc., etc. Therefore, teachers of languages and communication have to be particular about elaborating students' skills within different blocks of competences (systemic, analytical, and communicative).

4 CONCLUSIONS

To summarise: as the empirical material has shown, causativity in English discourse is actualised through relations of cause-effect, condition and purpose. Special importance of this type of interaction is determined by its universality since the principle of circular causation lies at the basis of the functioning of any system, including that of language and speech. Linguistics recognises causativity as the basic principle on which an integral work of speech is created and exists.

With this in view, certain conclusions have to be taken into account in classroom techniques.

Firstly, causativity makes the foundation of discourse sense integrity, systemacy and cohesion. Saying that it makes speech reasonable is no exaggeration.

Secondly, causative relations may be verbalised either explicitly or implicitly. While explicit verbal means are semantically quite unilateral, implicit expression of causativity is usually enriched with complementary pragmasemantic meanings. The latter case deserves special attention at English lessons as mastering such linguistic devices people become more efficient in achieving their communicative purposes.

Thirdly, the causative utterances acquire different functional loading depending not only on the selected language units expressing causative meaning, but also on the order of the components placement (whether the cause precedes or follows the consequence).

With all this in mind, students come to understand that manipulating discourse units which form causative relations, they can transform the cumulative sense of speech into the framework that best contributes to the overall communicative impact on the partner. Such skills are of significant importance when they are directed at harmonising communication, especially in situations of compromise search, disputes or discrepancies.
REFERENCES


