# Reductionism and contextualism in pragmatics and discourse analysis

Anne Reboul, Jacques Moeschler

# Reductionism and Contextualism
# in Pragmatics and Discourse analysis

Anne Reboul
CRIN-C.N.R.S. & INRIA-Lorraine
Jacques Moeschler
Université de Genève

**Abstract**: For the past twenty to thirty years, a good part of the domain of linguistics has been occupied by what has been called *discourse analysis*. Whereas syntax and sem antics are concerned by the sentence and the units from which the sentence is built, dis course analysis claims that interpretation cannot be accounted for at the level of the se ntence and that a bigger unit, such as discourse (usually rather poorly defined if at all), should be used to account for language interpretation. We want to show here that disc ourse is not, in any sense, a well defined object and that, though it is certainly necessar y to analyse how a given sequence of sentences is processed and understood, the notio n of *discourse* (and related notions such as *coherence*) does not have much to say about i t. We rely on epistemological considerations about the necessity of a moderate reductio nism and we sketch an account of linguistic interpretation which accounts for contextu al factors in linguistic interpretation through the notion of utterance (vs. sentence) and a development of Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory.

**Key-words**: discourse analysis, reductionism, scientifically relevant category, emergenc e 1, emergence 2, sentence, utterance, contextualism, relevance, coherence

## 1. Introduction

Discourse analysis is built on a premise:

(1)     Syntax and semantics are not sufficient to account for linguistic interpretation because their domain is the sentence.

Discourse analysts draw a conclusion from that premise:

(2)     To account for linguistic interpretation, it is necessary to have a unit larger than the sentence.

Discourse analysis has an obvious candidate for the status of larger unit: *discourse* (or *text* for the written language approaches). Yet it does not seem that discourse is in any way a well-defined entity and a unit which may be circumscribed through linguistic means. We will come back to that question in the next section.

Given that there is no precise definition of discourse, it is hard to evaluate the validity of an approach which substitutes discourse to sentence as a unit of scientific investigation, but it should be remarked that discourse, if it is a **linguistic** unit (as is claimed by most discourse analysts), cannot easily account for indexicals, to name only one thing. What is more, it may be doubted whether the lack of a precise or acceptable definition of discourse is a matter of chance: in fact, we think that a definition of discourse which would justify the investigation of discourse as a scientific endeavour is impossible.

## 2. The difficulties of defining discourse

As a good number of linguistic and cognitive terms, *discourse* also belongs to everyday language, where it is ambiguous between the interpretation where it means a sequence of utterances produced by a single individual in a special circumstance (inaugural speech, etc.), an understanding where it means a sequence of utterances which limits are determined by the circumstances, a third understanding where it means the linguistic expression of a thought, and a last understanding where it means a mere chatting. None of these common sense interpretations can be used to circumscribe a scientific entity. What is more, it does not seem that discourse analysts have succeeded in circumscribing the notion of discourse in a satisfactory way, their description, based on an analogy with the relation between sentence and grammaticality, defining discourse on the basis of coherence. In other words, a discourse is defined as a **coherent** sequence of utterances in the same way as a sentence is defined as a **grammatical** sequence of words. Yet, the analogy with syntax is not straightforward as the sentence can be defined through grammaticality because grammaticality is described through the rules of syntax, whereas coherence does not seem to obey a finite number of precise rules. Indeed, coherence, a quality which is attributed to discourse and should be enough to define it, does not connect with determined linguistic markers such as those of cohesion[1]: it is easy to show that cohesion markers are independent of the intuitive judgment of coherence or non-coherence bearing on a given sequence of utterances. There are incoherent sequences of utterances with or without cohesion markers and coherent sequences of utterances with or without cohesion markers (see Blass 1985, Moeschler 1989, Reboul to appear, Reboul & Moeschler 1995, 1996, among others). For instance, the discourse in (3) cannot be said to be coherent, and the adjonction of cohesion markers (indicated in bold for connectives, italics for discourse anaphora and Δ for ellipsis) does not solve the problem of coherence in (4):

(3)    John bought a cow. It is red-haired like a squirrel. It lives in the forest and hibernates during winter. It is very cold in this part of the world.

(4)    John bought a cow. **Indeed** *it* is red-haired like a squirrel. *It* lives in the forest and Δ hibernates during winter. **But** *it* is very cold in this part of the world.

In the same way, the lack of cohesion markers in (5) does not impede an interpretation (7), given the right context, such as (6):

(5)    We'll have guests tonight. Calderon was a great writer.

(6)    a. Today is the anniversary of Calderon's birth
       b. The speaker is a fan of Calderon.

(7)    The speaker is organising a diner in hommage to Calderon.

Thus the coherence judgment is independent of the presence or absence of cohesion markers.

---

[1] It has long been thought in discourse analysis that the so-called *c ohesion markers* (i.e. connectives, discourse anaphora, ellipsis) we re what made a sequence of sentences coherent.

It should be added, before coming back to the possibility of defining discourse, that the notion of coherence does not have the advantages expected: it does not help interpret indexicals (as it applies exclusively at the linguistic level); it does not yield an interpretation of discourse anaphora and, most notably, of definite descriptions (mainly because definite descriptions do not always refer back to an already mentioned object[2]); it does not help either to interpret evolving reference[3] anymore than it helps with tense or connectives. In other words, it seems that the notion of coherence is an intuitive and pre-theoretical notion and that, far from being of any help to analyse anything whatsoever, a judgment of coherence itself needs to be explained through other factors.

Let us come back to the definition of discourse: trying to define it through coherence does not seem highly efficient and recourse to linguistic markers yields circular or unadequate definitions. Thus, some discourse analysts (see Roulet & al. 1985) advanced the hypothesis that there are structures peculiar to discourse. Yet, it can be shown that one and the same discourse can receive two different structures or more, which leads to the thought that the structure is neither more nor less than the more or less formal representation of an interpretation: it is not an essential characteristic of a discourse, nor a help toward an interpretation (see Reboul & Moeschler 1985).

---

[2] Definite descriptions at the begining (first sentence) of novels, w hich are all perfectly understandable as is shown by the following e xamples, come to mind:
(i)
"The southbound train from Paris was the one we had always taken from time immemorial"
(Durrell, L., *Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness*).
(ii)
"Between the silver ribbon of morning and the green glitterin g ribbon of sea, the boat touched Hardwich..."
(Chesterton, G.K., *Father Brown Stories*).
(iii)
"London, Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancell or sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall."
(Dickens, Ch., *Bleak House*).
[3] The expression *evolving reference* designates the phenomenon fo und in examples where an object is introduced under a description, and where then a sequence of actions which radically modify that object are described, though the object is still being refered to thro ugh the same description or through a third person pronoun (the s tandard example was given by Brown, & Yule 1983: "Kill an active, plump chicken. Prepare it for the oven, cut it into four pieces and r oast it with thyme for 1 hour"; on evolving reference, see Reboul to appear).

Discourse, despite the widespread use of the notion, still has to be defined in a precise way. Our ambition here is not to give a definition of discourse which would justify the use to which discourse analysis puts it. Rather, we think that one must say how discourse is interpreted and, with this objective in view, we define it as follows:

**Def1**　A discourse is a non-arbitrary sequence of utterances[4].

This definition cannot be used to identify a unit yielding an analysis, but rather sequences of sentences in need of an analysis.

## 3. Reductionism

As long as we accept that the interpretation of discourses (under the above definition) must be accounted for, it could be asked in which way our proposal is different from that of discourse analysts. The answer is simple: we do not think that discourse has the necessary characteristics to be used as a minimal unit for any analysis whatever. Rather, the analysis of a given discourse must use other units of which none is the discourse concerned. In other words, we adopt an explicitly reductionist approach on discourse.

On our view, an explicitly reductionist position is a position which accounts for phenomena from scientifically relevant categories. A category is *scientifically relevant* only if it cannot be reduced to its elements and to the relations between these elements, i.e. when it is emergent in a specific sense or when it does not have any element. We distinguish between *emergent1* facts and *emergent2* facts[5]:

**Def2**　*Definition of emergence1*
　　　　A fact F is emergent1 iff
(i)　　　F is composed of elements a, b, c…
(ii)　　F has some features which are not or not necessarily features of a, b, c…
(iii)　　Some of the features of F can be deduced or computed from the features of a, b, c… on the basis of their arrangement or composition.
(iv)　　Some other features of F are explained in terms of the causal interactions among a, b, c…: those are causally emergent features.

**Def3**　*Definition of emergence2*
　　　　A fact F' is emergent2 iff:
(i)　　　F' is emergent1.
(ii)　　F' has causal powers which cannot be explained by the causal interactions of a, b, c…

---

[4] We will justify below the expression "non-arbitrary". By the way, it should be obvious that our ambition is not to give a definition of discourse which would allow it to be the unit of any domain in linguistics, as text linguists and discourse analysts tried to. As will be seen in the next section, we do not think that discourse is a linguistic unit in the sense in which a phonem or a morphem are linguistic units.

[5] The form of this distinction is directly inspired by Searle (1992, 111-112). For a development, see Reboul & Moeschler (1995) and (1996).

According to us, a category is scientifically relevant iff it is emergent2 and we think that discourse is not an emergent2 category, but an emergent1 category. To justify this position, we must do two things: on the one hand, we must show that discourse does not have causal properties which cannot be explained through the causal interactions between its elements; on the other hand, we must say what are the elements of discourse. We will begin by the second task.

If we come back to linguistics, each of the traditional domains in linguistics corresponds to a scientifically emergent category, either because this category is emergent2, or because it cannot be divided into smaller units. Thus, phonology has as its category the phoneme and the relations between phonemes and, at least from a linguistic point of view[6], there are no smaller units of which the phoneme would be composed. Syntax and semantics have as a scientifically relevant category the morpheme which is a typical example of emergent2 fact: indeed, if, from a phonological perspective, the morpheme is composed of phonemes, neither the syntactic category it belongs to nor its meaning can be reduced to its phonemes or to the relations between these phonemes[7]. On the reverse, the sentence is an emergent1 fact, which can be reduced to the elements which compose it (the morphemes) and to the relations between these elements[8]. If we come back to the postulate of discourse analysis (1), it might be tempting to conclude that discourse is an emergent2 fact and thus a scientifically relevant category:

(1)     Syntax and semantics are not sufficient to account for linguistic interpretation because of their domain, which is the sentence.

In a reductionist perspective, this postulate could be reformulated in the following way:

(1')    a. Discourse cannot be reduced to sentences which compose it and to the relations between these sentences because the sentence is not a scientifically relevant category.
        b. Discourse cannot be reduced to morphemes because the morphemes which compose i t and the relations between them are not sufficient to account for the causal properties of discourse.

Thus it would seem that discourse is an emergent2 fact and, in this sense, constitutes a scientifically relevant category.

Still, if discourse cannot be reduced to sentences or morphemes, this does not mean that it cannot be reduced to something else and, in this case, we rather naturally think of utterances. If the proposal to reduce discourse to utterance is to be meaningful, we must: a) define utterance; b) show that utterance is a scientifically relevant category; c) show that discourse can be

---

[6] It is not the case in automatic speech recognition, but that is anot her problem...

[7] Thus *radical reductionism* which would see no difficulty in reduci ng discourse, sentence or morpheme to phoneme and *moderate re ductionism* which refuses this reduction without refusing to reduce the sentence to morphemes should not be confused.

[8] It is the semantic hypothesis of compositionality.

reduced to the utterances which compose it and to the relations between these utterances.

In a highly unoriginal way, we adopt the following definition of utterance:

**Def4**    *Definition of utterance*
        A utterance is the result of the specific production of a sentence.

We must still show that utterance does not reduce to sentence. To do this, it is enough to show that utterance interpretation requires non linguistic informations. This is of course the case for indexicals and it is sufficient to show that utterance is more than sentence and does obviously not reduce to morphemes[9]. Thus, the interpretation of (8):

(8)      I am here now.

as the occurrence of a sentence, will change depending on the speaker, time and place of production. All occurrences of sentence (8) will yield different interpretations for the deictics.

What is more, utterance interpretation cannot reduce only to the linguistic informations transmitted by the corresponding sentence, as is shown by the problem of discourse anaphora. It does not seem doubtful that utterance is both distinct from the sentence (i.e. does not reduce to it) and constitutes a scientifically relevant category. Thus, discourse might well not be a scientifically relevant category, despite (1'), in as much as it could be reduced to the utterances which make it. We will show that this is right below.

## 4. Reductionism and contextualism

Showing that discourse is not a scientifically relevant category and that it can be reduced to utterances composing it and to the relations between utterances is a reductionist goal, which success goes paradoxically through contextualist considerations. Récanati (1994) describes the differences between contextualist and anti-contextualist approaches in the history of analytical philosophy and indicates, rightly, that the distinction between the one or the other of these approaches goes through the importance attributed to the distinction between formal language and natural language. If the sentences of a formal language have an interpretation fixed and independent of context, it is, to say the least, doubtful that it is the case for the sentences of a natural language which interpretation seems influenced by context. According to contextualism, this difference is very important, while anti-contextualists think that it can be resolved if the problem is seen from a certain level of abstraction.

---

[9] Which means neither that the morphemes which compose a given utterance do not influence the interpretation of this utterance, nor that this interpretation can ignore syntactic and semantic analyses of the corresponding sentence. Simply, utterance interpretation is not equivalent with (= does not reduce to) syntactic and semantic analyses of sentence.

The thesis of the anti-contextualists is based on the following principle (Récanati 1994, 157):

(9)    For every statement which can be made using a context-sensitive sentence in a given context, there is an eternal sentence[10] that can be used to make the same statement in any context.

If anti-contextualists were right, it would have to be admitted that discourse can be reduced to morphemes and that there are no basic difference between sentence and utterance, i.e. that utterance interpretation is the same as the corresponding sentence interpretation. We have seen above that this is not the case and we will not discuss it any further. Récanati, in his paper (*ibid.*, 161), shows that Grice's anti-contextualist argument is not acceptable because it relies on a *petitio principii* by presupposing a principle, the *Parallelism Principle*, which is not acceptable for contextualists:

(10)    *Parallelism Principle*
        If a (syntactically complete) sentence can be used in different contexts to say different things (to express different propositions), then the explanation for this contextual variation of content is that the sentence has different linguistic meanings□īs semantically ambiguous.

Obviously the alliance between the principle of parallelism and the principle of modified Occam's razor (which prohibits the multiplication of linguistic meanings) forbids that the same sentence can be used in different contexts with different interpretations. Yet, it should be noticed that the principle of parallelism supposes that utterance interpretation, reduced on this view to sentence interpretation, is entirely codic, that is that linguistic interpretation strictly speaking (syntax and semantics) is enough to utterance interpretation, which is highly doubtful. As Récanati says, a contextualist position does not commit one to attributing a basic ambiguity to sentences or morphemes: it is enough to postulate an under-determination in language and to consider that utterance interpretation is equivalent with sentence meaning. The sentence is thus not ambiguous, but under-determined. The proposition expressed does not depend exclusively, on this view, on linguistic meaning, but also depends on contextual elements. Note that this position, which Récanati names *Methodological Contextualism*, is exactly that which we have defended in the previous section: it is tantamount with considering that utterance is emergent2 relative to sentence.

Hence the paradox evoked above can be solved: to defend a reductionist position regarding discourse, one must adopt a contextualist position regarding utterance. We will now develop this position and show how the utterance is interpreted and how utterance interpretation is sufficient to account for discourse.

## 5. Contextualism and utterance

Coming back to the anti-contextualist thesis in (9), note that, even if it were true, it has nothing to say about the function which the context does or

---

[10] An eternal sentence is a sentence which interpretation is context -independant.

does not play in utterance interpretation, mainly because it does not deal with utterance interpretation or even with sentence interpretation:

(9)      For every statement which can be made using a context-sensitive sentence in a given context, there is an eternal sentence that can be used to make the same statement in any context.

In this and the next sections, we will deal not with the existence or non-existence of eternal sentences but with utterance interpretation and the respective weight of linguistic and contextual data in this interpretation.

Taking a contextualist stance does not imply denying that linguistic data (lexicon, syntax, etc.) have a role in utterance interpretation. It merely means saying that these data are not sufficient and that they must be completed by non-linguistic interpretation processes, which can be called *contextual*. Utterance belongs to the domain of pragmatics rather to that of linguistics, i.e. to the domain of language use, rather than to that of language *simpliciter*. We thus adopt a pragmatic perspective, the post-gricean perspective which was developed by Sperber et Wilson in their book, *Relevance* (1995).

Relevance Theory is a pragmatic theory of a new kind, in as much as it is both cognitive (it lies in the chomskyan paradigm where the study of language is a part of cognitive sciences), truth-conditional and inferential. According to Sperber and Wilson, faithful to Fodor's modular theory (1983), pragmatics is the last step in utterance interpretation. It is a non-specific process which belongs to the central system and uses an inference device to interpret the utterance. The inference device has as its premises the data accessed through the input system specialised in the processing of linguistic data and the propositions in the context. These propositions come from different origins: the interpretation of preceeding utterances, encyclopaedic knowledge of the world, perception data coming from the physical environment where the communication occurs. They are selected on the basis of a principle, the *principle of relevance*, which says that every utterance carries the presumption of its own optimal relevance. Relevance is a function both of the cost of utterance processing (the less difficult to process the utterance, the more relevant it is) and of the effects produced by the utterance in a given context (the more effects produced by an utterance in a given context, the more relevant this utterance in this context). The effects concerned are of three kinds: changing the force with which a proposition is entertained; yielding new propositions or synthetic contextual implications, deduced from the utterance **and** the context; suppressing a proposition when a contradiction occurs. On this view, the propositions in the context have been chosen because they were the best able to yield an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance. The principle of relevance also comes into play at the end of the interpretation process to stop it when an interpretation consistent with the principle of relavance has been attained.

Note that, though they are contextualist, Sperber and Wilson are nonetheless of the gricean family, especially in their view of what an utterance is: they insist on the importance of speaker's intentions in the communication process and distinguish the speaker's informative intention (making manifest or more manifest to the hearer a set of assumptions) and the speaker's communicative intention (making mutually manifest that the speaker has this

informative intention). Communication is successful when the speaker's communicative intention has been satisfied: through his utterance, he or she made manifest to his hearer the set of assumptions which was the object of his or her informative intention. We will here adopt this theory of utterance interpretation. Thus, the reason why we say that utterances rather than sentences are emergent2 is that utterance interpretation is a central system process, going through an inferential device relative to a context, whereas sentence interpretation is an input system process which goes through purely linguistic devices and is not relative to a context.

## 6. Contextualism and discourse

We still have to say how discourse is interpreted and to show that it is in fact reducible to the utterances of which it is made and to the relations between these utterances. It seems that discourse, like utterance, is interpreted *via* people's ability to mutually attribute to themselves and others beliefs, intentions, feelings, etc.: in other words, *via* what was called by Dennett (1987) the *intentional stance*. The intentional stance is both the ability and the tendency to attribute to others internal representations (beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.). It has the rather notable characteristic of being mandatory and to apply farther than other beings, to the most simple mechanical devices. As Dennett says:"[there is an] unavoidability of the intentional stance, with regard to oneself and one's fellow intelligent beings". This characteristic of the intentional stance partially explains the principle of relevance, that is the fact that each utterance conveys a guarantee of its own optimal relevance. As Sperber and Wilson say, the principle of relevance is not a constraint which the speaker should try to satisfy or to which he might desobey: it is a general principle of interpretation which apply in all circumstances.

If the intentional stance is one of the origins of the principle of relevance, it is clear that it applies at the level of discourse as much as at the level of utterance and this is also true of the principle of relevance. This means that if utterance interpretation aims to recover the informative intention of the speaker at a local level, it seems plausible that there are one or more intentions behind a discourse and that discourse interpretation aims to recover these intentions[11]. We will distinguish *local intentions*, which have to do with utterance from *global intentions* which have to do with discourse. The problem, to justify that discourse can be reduced to utterances, is to show how global intentions can be recovered on the basis of local intentions (i.e. how discourse interpretation can be reduced to utterance interpretation).

How then can one go from local intentions to global intentions? It seems to us that a static analysis where local intentions accumulate to form a global intention which would be accessible only at the end of discourse and which would be equivalent with the set of local intentions would not be satisfying. We would rather propose a dynamic analysis of the interpretation process. According to us, in the same way as utterance interpretation is a dynamic process, discourse interpretation is also a dynamic process. Let us return to the intentional stance: it has as its object the intentions, etc. of other people. Its main interest is that it allows to predict the future behaviour and intentions of

---

[11] This does not mean that the hearer always attains the "right" intention, i.e. misunderstandings or errors are always possible.

other people. In a good number of cases, it allows to choose appropriate reactions or to anticipate the behaviour of other people. In the case of linguistic communication, the same thing is true because the intentional stance is accompanied by the principle of relevance which reinforces its predictive power. At utterance level, this means that utterance interpretation also proceeds by anticipation. The hearer forms anticipatory hypotheses on what will be the end of the utterance based on its begining, and thus reduces, when these hypotheses are right, the processing cost. That this process occurs can be seen each time an individual begins a sentence which his or her hearer ends for him or her. On our view, discourse interpretation implies, as utterance interpretation, that anticipatory hypotheses are built on the basis of the interpretation of successive utterances and of the inferences which the hearer can draw from them about the speaker's global intentions.

The passage from local intentions to global intentions occurs here: as soon as the first utterance is produced by the speaker, the hearer builds a representation of the speaker's global intention (he wants to talk of this or that subject, etc.). This global intention is then modified with each new utterance, with three possibilities which, not surprisingly, are the same as those which occur in the context:

(i)     a local intention can contradict one element of the global intention, in which case this element will be erased;

(ii)    a local intention can change the force with which an element of the global intention is entertained, making it either more or less plausible;

(iii)   a local intention can, in conjunction with the elements in the global intention, inferentially produce one or more new elements in the global intention.

Let us illustrate with the help of a short example the process of construction of anticipatory hypothesis which lead to the attribution of a global intention on the basis of local intentions:

(10)    "(a) My aunt was exceedingly pretty, and (b) when she looked at me she smiled admiringly. (c) Turning to my mother she said, 'You know, Minnie, Julius has the loveliest big brown eyes I've seen.'
(d) Until that moment I had never given my eyes a thought. Oh, I knew I was nearsighted, but it never occured to me that my eyes were anything out of the ordinary. (e) Conscious of my new-found charms, I lifted my eyebrows as high as I could and stared at her. She didn't look at me again but I continued to stare, hoping that if my eyes continued to bulge she would pay me another compliment. But no, she was busily gossiping with my mother and apparently had forgotten all about me. I kept walking up and down in front of her, hoping she would again say something flattering about my big brown eyes. (…)
(f) I finally realized that my case was hopeless and (…) I staggered from the room puzzled and feverish, (g) but happy at the first compliment I had ever received from a woman… even if it was only a casual remark from an aunt.
(h) It wasn't until much later that I looked into a mirror (i) and discovered that my eyes are gray"

(Marx, G., *Memoirs of a mangy lover*).

Very roughly, (a) establishing the "exceeding prettiness" of Groucho's aunt, allows the reader to draw the conclusion that Groucho is attracted to her and ready to take whatever it is that she would say very seriously. (b) and (c) indicate what it was that she did say, i.e. the compliment on Groucho's eyes. Given all the conclusions that can be drawn from (a), (b) and (c), the reader is not surprised by the description of Groucho's state of mind and activities in (d) and (e). (f) and (g) reinforces all the previous conclusions on Groucho's happiness at being paid such a compliment by his pretty aunt. (h) and (i) come as a kind of counterpoint to all the preceeding, establishing that, no matter whether the aunt's compliment was or was not sincere, it was, anyway ill-founded: either she is colour-blind or she did not pay him the attention that he had thought she had. One could sum the whole thing up by saying that, though all the local intentions attached to the previous utterances lead to the local intention attached to the last utterance (i), the global intention is not the simple accumulation of those local intentions: it is rather the intention to lead the reader to an array of conclusions about the failibility of women, the unability of men to understand that women may not mean what they say, etc., relying for strenght of these effects on the conclusion drawn previously on the state of mind of Groucho.

All of this leads to the thesis that the elements of the global intention have a propositional form and that, in one way or another, they are integrated to the context and correspond, in the context, to the informations drawn from the interpretation of preceeding utterances or, rather, to some of them. This contextualist hypothesis on discourse interpretation and utterance interpretation allows a reductionist approach of discourse which reduces to utterances and to the relations between utterances which are established during the interpretation process. We would like now, as a conclusion, to say a few words about coherence.

## 7. Discourse and coherence

As said above (see §2), it seems extraordinarily difficult to define discourse and the most common endeavour to do so relies on the common sense notion of *coherence*. Yet it appears that coherence is not a more precise or more easily defined notion than is discourse and all the research trying to establish it on linguistic markers have clearly failed. Yet, just as there are discourses in the sense of definition Def1, there are judgments of coherence and these judgments, no matter how intuitive they are, must be integrated to a theory of discourse interpretation, that is it must account for them. It seems that there are two possible strategies: either new elements accounting for these coherence judgments must be added to the discourse theory outlined above, or elements already present in this theory can be used to account for these judgments, without adding anything to the theory. The first strategy would be a kind of justification for the idea that there is a notion of coherence at least partly independent from discourse, which might either be defined or taken as a primitive and which would itself allow the definition of discourse. The second strategy does not in any way ressucitate the hope of a definition of discourse *via* coherence as, in a way, it dissolves coherence in utterance interpretation, without making it an independent principle or reality. Rather obviously, we will adopt the second strategy.

How are judgments of coherence formed? Do they depend on the properties of the discourse to which they are applied, independently of the interpretation of this discourse? It seems clear to us that coherence is not an intrinsic property of discourse and that coherence judgments depend both on the way discourse interpretation proceeded and on the richness or poverty of the global intention which the hearer (who is the source of the coherence judgment) has drawn from it. Just as relevance depends both on the processing cost and on the richness of effects, coherence is attributed to a discourse depending both on the difficulty encountered when constructing a global interpretation for this discourse and on the richness of this global intention. On this view, coherence, just as relevance, is a relative notion rather than an absolute notion and can bear degrees. We propose the following principle:

(16)  *Judgment of coherence*
(a)   The more easy to construct the global intention of a given discourse is, the more coherent this discourse is.
(b)   The richer the global intention of a given discourse is, the more coherent this discourse is.

Yet, despite their apparent similarity, the notion of coherence and the notion of relevance are radically different. The first only applies at the end of the interpretation process and is not part of it, while the second is the main principle governing interpretation. Thus coherence is a static notion in as much as it only occurs at the end of the process, while relevance is a dynamic notion which guides the interpretation process. Note that, according to discourse analysts, the reverse formula should be true: *Relevance is a static notion in as much as it comes at the end of the process while coherence is a dynamic notion guiding the interpretation process*. What is wrong with such a formula? Obviously, the lack of a definition for coherence: if it is coherence which guides discourse interpretation, then, given the lack of a definition, discourse analysis makes the interpretation process opaque, and sees it, more or less, as a black box. On the reverse, relevance has a definition and, thus, the process of utterance interpretation and of discourse interpretation can be described and coherence can be defined as the product of interpretation rather than its moving principle or as an intrinsic and mysterious property of discourse.

## 8. Conclusion

Last, we would like to compare the two approaches, the one which we have criticised, discourse analysis, and the one which we defend, a theory of discourse interpretation which is both reductionist and contextualist in the theoretical framework of relevance theory. According to us, discourse analysts have never been able to give a satisfactory definition of discourse whether they tried to base such a definition on the notion of coherence or to define it *via* a structure which would be specific to it, in a teleological endeavour doomed to fail. What is more, discourse analysis fails to account for discourse interpretation, mainly because it bases this interpretation on the notion of coherence, failing to describe coherence and thus transforming the interpretation process into a mysterious process about which it seems difficult to say anything precise. On the reverse, we think that the unit which allows for the description of discourse interpretation is not discourse, but utterance and, in the perspective of relevance theory, we propose a contextualist theory of utterance interpretation and of discourse interpretation which offers an account of coherence. Under this definition, coherence is merely a result and is cut

down to its true role, that is an epiphenomenon of the process of discourse interpretation.

# REFERENCES

Blass, R. (1985), "Cohesion, coherence and relevance", UCL, ms.

Brown, G. & Yule, G. (1983), *Discourse analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Dennett, D.C. (1987), *The intentional stance*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

Fodor, J. (1983), *The modurarity of mind*, Cambridge (Mass;), The MIT Press.

Moeschler, J. (1989), *Modélisation du dialogue*, Paris, Hermès.

Reboul, A. & Moeschler, J. (1995) "Le dialogue n'est pas une catégorie naturelle scientifiquement pertinente", in *Cahiers de Linguistique française 17*.

Reboul, A. & Moeschler, J. (1996), "Faut-il continuer à faire de l'analyse de discours", Hermes. Journal of Linguistics 16.

Reboul, A. & Moeschler, J. (in process), *Contre l'analyse de discours la construction d'un sens commun*, Päris, Armand Collin.

Reboul, A. (ed.)(to appear), *Evolving reference and anaphora: Time and objects*, Amsterdam, Benjamins.

Récanati, F. (1994), "Contextualism and anti-contextualism in the philosophy of language", in S.L. Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of speech act theory*, London, Routledge, 157-16.

Roulet, E. et al. (1985), *L'articulation du discours en français contemporain*, Berne, Lang.

Searle, J.R. (1992), *The rediscovery of the mind*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1995), *Relevance Communication and Cognition*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.