Linguistic markers of discourse coherence:
Insights from corpus and experimental data

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Cognitively oriented linguists have various resources at their disposal and need to develop methodological strategies of when to use which method. By focusing on causal relations and their linguistic markers in discourse, I will illustrate the benefits of the methodology of using converging evidence and show what kinds of insights this brings at the level of discourse coherence. Research results from several methodologies will be discussed, including the use of corpus-based studies of causal connectives, in both spoken and written discourse, in various languages.

Results from processing experiments, including eye-tracking and other production and interpretation studies, reveal how online relation processing proceeds, indicating the role of connectives as processing instructions (Sanders & Evers-Vermeul, 2019), but also showing a crucial role for prosody in distinguishing between objective versus subjective causal interpretations in English (Hu et al., 2022). The results suggest that Causality and Subjectivity are two cognitive principles that organize our knowledge of coherence relations. They help us explain the system and use of causal relations and their linguistic expressions in everyday language use, and they account for discourse processing and representation. Finally, the status of descriptive and cognitive adequacy (Scholman et al., 2022) will be discussed.

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