

Intentionality and Structure in Discourse Relations

**Proceedings of a Workshop
Sponsored by the
Special Interest Group on Generation
of the
Association for Computational Linguistics**

**Edited by
Owen Rambow**

**21 June 1993
Ohio State University
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Preface

Generating multi-sentential text requires the ability to compose individual clauses into larger units, a process called *text planning*. Clearly, text planning is an important component of our linguistic competence: we do not always communicate by single, isolated, clause-sized utterances. Two approaches to this question in the field of text generation have proved seminal: McKeown's 1982 thesis, in which she uses rhetorical schemata to represent typical domain-independent text structures, and the text planners under development at ISI since 1988 under the direction of Ed Hovy, which use plan operators based on Mann and Thompson's *Rhetorical Structure Theory* (RST) in a STRIPS-like planning architecture. What these two approaches have in common is the term "rhetorical" and the claim that they are domain-independent architectures. While they have spawned a large number of approaches, architectures, systems, and theories, there has been a general undercurrent of dissatisfaction with things "rhetorical"; for example, various discourse phenomena have been identified in the literature that specific theories (usually, RST) cannot handle, or cannot handle elegantly. Furthermore, researchers in discourse analysis (as opposed to text generation) have by and large ignored rhetorical approaches, or brushed them off as insignificant, often arguing that rhetorical relations are an epiphenomenon of deeper relations between communicative intentions. This widespread use of, and simultaneous dislike of, rhetorical relations has motivated this workshop. If a theory of rhetorical relations is useful (or required?) for text planning, then it must contain some useful insight. If such theories are disliked, then present theories of rhetorical relations (such as RST) need to be improved, or perhaps completely reworked. In order to approach these tasks, a clearer understanding of the underlying theoretical issues is required. The goal of the workshop is to bring together researchers from different fields, including discourse understanding, discourse generation, and linguistic discourse analysis, and to discuss the relationship between discourse relations, intentions, and the representation of the discourse participants' beliefs, desires, and intentions. The hope is that a lively discussion will help identify useful insights that should be retained, and obvious errors that should be avoided, in future theories of discourse structure.

I would like to thank the members of the organizing committee, Judy Delin, Ed Hovy, and Johanna Moore, for reviewing all submissions and for their extensive help in the organization of the workshop; the ACL, for financial support; the Institute for Research in Cognitive Science at the University of Pennsylvania, for logistical support; Terry Patten, for local organization help; and Don Walker, for help with everything from sending out the Call for Papers to printing these proceedings.

Owen Rambow
Chair, Organizing Committee

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