

Correction rhetorical relation in formal speeches

Relación retórica de corrección en discursos formales

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Abstract: This paper aims at analyzing correction discourse restatement strategy using the framework of Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST). In order to achieve such goal, the definition of correction rhetorical relation presented by Antonio and Cassim (2012) is used in the paper. RST is a theory which describes text organization considering that implicit propositions arise from the combination of parts of the text. The research *corpus* of this paper consists of five university lectures in Brazilian Portuguese of about 80 minutes long each, which were transcribed alphabetically and segmented into intonation units. Subjects are university professors and the lectures present a formal register. Text spans in which correction relation emerges will be analyzed regarding the features which are corrected (linguistic of enunciative), extension of the correction (cancel or partially correct the source expression), operationalization (autoinitiated vs. heteroinitiated; autocorrection vs. heterocorrection), degree of verbalization (totally verbalized, partially verbalized or projected expression), realization of the correction (interruption with repetition, interruption without repetition, with expression, attenuated correction, with pause, with vowel prolongation).

Keywords: Correction, Rhetorical Structure Theory, Spoken Discourse.

Resumen: Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar la estrategia discursiva de la reexpresión, corrección, utilizando el marco teórico de la Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST). Para lograr tal objetivo, se utiliza en este trabajo la definición de la relación retórica de corrección presentada por Antonio y Cassim (2012). La RST es una teoría que describe la organización del texto, teniendo presente que las proposiciones implícitas surgen de la combinación de partes del texto. El corpus de investigación de este trabajo consiste en cinco conferencias universitarias en portugués de Brasil, de cerca de 80 minutos de duración cada una, que fueron transcritas alfabéticamente y segmentadas en unidades de entonación. Los sujetos son profesores universitarios y las conferencias presentan un registro formal. Serán analizadas las porciones de texto en que surge la relación de corrección, de acuerdo con las características que se corrigen (lingüísticas o de enunciación), extensión de la corrección (cancelar o corregir parcialmente la expresión de origen), operacionalización (autoiniciada vs. heteroiniciada; autocorrección vs. heterocorrección), grado de verbalización (totalmente verbalizado, parcialmente verbalizado o expresión proyectada), la realización de la corrección (interrupción con la repetición, la interrupción sin repetición, con la expresión, la corrección atenuada, con pausa, con la prolongación de vocal).

Palabras clave: Corrección, Rhetorical Structure Theory, Discurso Hablado.

1 Introduction

This paper aims at analyzing correction discourse restatement strategy using the framework of Rhetorical Structure Theory

(RST). In order to achieve such goal, the definition of correction rhetorical relation presented by Antonio and Cassim (2012) is used in the paper. The definition of the relation by the authors is based on RST, a theory which

describes text organization considering that implicit propositions arise from the combination of parts of the text. RST emerged from studies developed in the University of California in the 1980's aiming at automatic text generation (Matthiessen 2005). The studies went beyond the initial purpose and RST started being used as a framework for text analysis (Mann and Thompson 1987).

According to its founding authors (Mann and Thompson 1988), RST is a functional theory of text structure and it is useful in the study of text coherence, as it depends in part on the implicit propositions held between portions of the text. Such propositions which arise from discourse structure are called relational propositions (Mann and Thompson 1983). Giering (2007) states that RST analyses assign a role and an intention to each discourse unit based on the intention of the speaker/writer.

RST is also used to investigate linguistic issues such as clause combining even if there is no grammatical or lexical signal of the combination (Mann and Thompson 1988). Decat (1993) gives an example of how implicit relations arise without being necessary signaled. In typical Brazilian expression “Leite com manga, morre!”, condition relation can be inferred despite the lack of a conjunction: “Se você beber leite com manga, você pode morrer” (If you drink milk with mango, you may die). Decat (2001, p. 128) states that “what matters is the type of relational proposition that emerges from the combining of the clauses, and not the lexical signal of the relation”¹ (our translation).

For Mann, Matthiessen and Thompson (1992), relational propositions can communicate information as explicit assertions do. Although a lexical, morphological or syntactic signal may occur in conjunction with the relation, the communication can be entirely implicit.

Mann and Thompson (1987) state that relational propositions form a coherent whole. The recognition of the relations, according to the authors (Mann and Thompson 1988) rests on functional and semantic judgements. Relations are present both in macrostructure and in microstructure of the text. In Van Dijk's definition (1992, pp. 50-51) macrostructure is

1 “... importa o tipo de proposição relacional que emerge da articulação de cláusulas, e não a marca lexical dessa relação”.

the “semantic information that grants global coherence to discourse” (our translation). On the other hand, microstructure regards “relations between sentences or between propositions, i.e., in pairs, linear connections between elements in a sequence” (our translation).

Relational propositions receive other labels such as “discourse relations”, “coherence relations” or “rhetorical relations” (Taboada 2009). Regarding organization, relations can be of two types:

1) nucleus-satellite (hypotactical), in which satellite is ancillary to the nucleus. This type of organization is represented in figure 1: an arch goes from satellite to nucleus.

2) multinuclear (paratactical), in which a text span is not ancillary to the other. Each span is a distinct nucleus, as in figure 2.

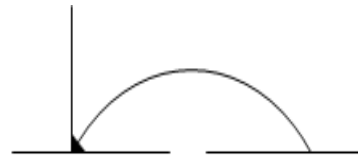


Figure 1: Nucleus-satellite schema (Mann and Thompson 1988)



Figure 2: Multinuclear schema (Mann and Thompson 1988)

Correction discourse restatement strategy is a manner to solve formulation, linearization and processing problems. According to Fávero, Andrade and Aquino (1999), to correct is to produce a linguistic expression (restating expression – RE) which restates the previous one (source expression – SE).

Based on Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), Barros (1993) points that correction can cancel the SE which is replaced (invalidation) or partially correct the SE (rectification). Correction concerns linguistic features (phonetic-phonologic, lexical, morphosyntactic) or enunciative features (epistemic modalization, prosody). Furthermore, according to Fávero (2005), correction has interactional function, seeking

cooperation, intercomprehension and involvement among the speakers. In terms of use, the speaker employs correction strategy in order to make his/her point clear, to make his speech act appropriate to the communicative situation, to seek his/her addressee's interest or attention. Corrections may also be divided according to the operationalization:

a) autoinitiated autocorrection: processed by the speaker him/herself in the same conversational turn or in another conversational turn;

b) heteroinitiated autocorrection: processed by the addressee;

c) autoinitiated heterocorrection: the speaker starts making the correction, which is accomplished by the addressee.

Corrections can also be divided according to the degree of verbalization of the SE: fully verbalized, partially verbalized or only projected. Correction can be made whether SE is fully verbalized or only projected.

Regarding realization, correction may be divided as follows: interruption with repetition, interruption without repetition, with expression, attenuated correction, with pause, with vowel prolongation.

As correction strategy is widely used in spoken discourse by speakers, it is important to investigate correction relation in the framework of RST.

2. Methodology

The research *corpus* of this paper consists of five university lectures in Brazilian Portuguese of about 80 minutes long each. Subjects are university professors and the lectures present a formal register.

Other features that can be noticed on the lectures are speakers' roles and conversational turns previously determined (Koch and Souza e Silva 1996). Thus, there are few interaction signals, as the professor keeps the conversational turn most of the time. There are few interruptions from the audience for querying. These lectures also have a well-marked beginning with the presentation of the aims of the class, as well as a closure in which the topics of the next class are anticipated, as in examples (1) and (2).

- (1) **Então hoje eu vou estar passando para vocês o relatório que vai ter que ser feito,**
é o trabalho que vocês vão ter que fazer agora

com os dados que foram coletados, tá?

So today I will be assigning to you the report that will have to be done,

It's the paper that you will have to go write now with the data that was collected, ok?

- (2) E pra isso é primordial nós estudarmos o comportamento biológico da suspensão, a reologia da suspensão.

O que é isso?

Nós vamos deixar pro próximo capítulo, **pra próxima aula, tá?**

Ah, gente, eu tava esquecendo,

Ó, presta atenção só um pouquinho:

As suspensões eu mandei pra vocês por e-mail os slides.

Aqui tem o roteiro da aula, o programa da aula, e tem xerox: são quatro, cinco capítulos de livros modernos sobre suspensões.

And for this it is very important that we study the biological behaviour of suspensions, the rheology of suspensions.

What's this?

We'll leave for the next chapter, **for the next class, ok?**

Oh, people, I was forgetting.

Look, pay attention a little.

The suspensions I sent to you via e-mail the slides.

Here is the guide of the class, the class programme, and there are photocopies: they are four, five chapters of modern books about suspensions

The lectures were transcribed alphabetically and segmented into intonation units, defined by Chafe (1988, p. 1-2) as "brief spurts of vocalization" characterized by a single coherent intonation contour with a clause or sentence final intonation, usually separated by pauses and generally with a clause-like structure.

3. Correction spoken discourse strategy and correction rhetorical relation

A list of 25 relations was initially suggested by Mann and Thompson (1988) after the analysis of hundreds of texts with RST. Afterwards an extended version of the list has been provided at **RST** website

(<http://www.sfu.ca/rst/01intro/definitions.html>).

This list is not a closed one, and other relations can be defined according to the investigated

type or genre of text. Considering that there was not a specific relation in the list that could be applied when correction strategy is used, Antonio and Cassim (2012) defined correction relation as in Table 1:

Relation name	Constraints on either Satellite or Nucleus individually	Constraints on Nucleus + Satellite	Intention of Speaker
Correction	None	The content of N is considered wrong by the speaker, who produces S to replace N.	Speaker recognizes the information that must replace N.

Table 1: Correction rhetorical relation (Antonio and Cassim 2012)

It is necessary to make a distinction between rhetorical relations and spoken discourse strategies in order to avoid the mistaken interpretation that they are equivalent. In spoken language, discourse strategies are important phenomena for communicative success and the strategies are used by speakers to signal the rhetorical relations. In the research *corpus* correction strategy is usually realized by correction relation, as in Figure 3:

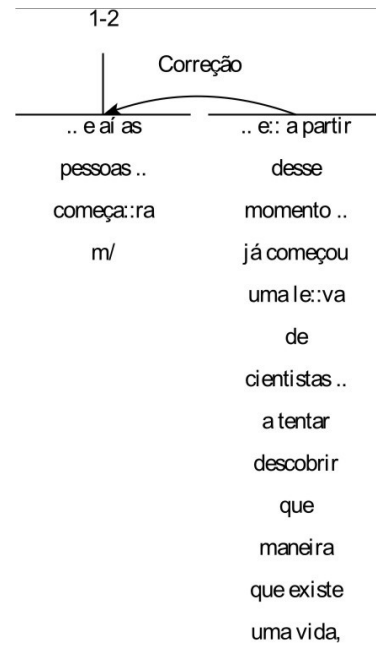


Figure 3: Correction relation
Source: Cassim (2014)

In the example of Figure 3, the Biology professor initially conveys the information that people started drawing conclusions about the origin of life (unit 1), but, next, he corrects himself pointing that actually scientists were responsible for the theories about the origin of life (unit 2). Correction relation is a nucleus-satellite relation in which SE is the nucleus and RE is the satellite.

Regarding operationalization, all the 219 text spans with correction relation found in the *corpus* were autoinitiated and autocorrected as in Figure 4. Such result is motivated by production conditions of the texts of the *corpus*. As the professors keep the conversational turn most of the time, it is natural that they process the correction because they must be focused on the information they are conveying. Behaving in such a way, they avoid being corrected by the students.

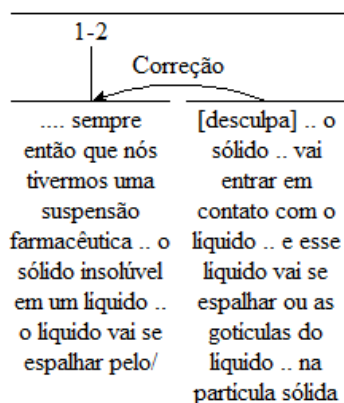


Figure 4 – Autoinitiated autocorrection
Source: the authors

In the example of Figure 4, correction is realized by expression “desculpa” (sorry) used by the speaker to signal that he/she is going to correct him/herself. The different types of realization of correction in the *corpus* is presented in Table 2.

	N	%
Interruption without repetition	100	45,66
Interruption with repetition	86	39,27
Expression	17	7,76
Pause	6	2,74
Vowel prolongation	6	2,74
Attenuated correction	4	1,83
Total	219	100

Table 2: Realization

Correction was signaled by some lexical expression in only 7,76% of the spans in which correction strategy was used by the speakers. Besides the expression “desculpa” mentioned in Figure 4, other expressions were also used: “ou” (or), “eh”, “perdão” (pardon), “ou melhor” (or better) and “não” (no).

In 2,74% of the spans speakers made pauses between SE and RE in order to gain some time to formulate RE. The prolongation of vowels presents the same frequency as the pauses and is also used with the same motive: gain time for a better formulation of RE.

Attenuated correction is the least frequent realization in the *corpus* (1,83%). There aren't prosodic or formal expressions to introduce the RE because the mistake is less serious. Thus there is less marking as the speaker interrupts

his/her speech smoothly when performing the correction.

The most frequent realization of correction, however, is by means of interruption without repetition, 45,66%. Interruption with repetition, as in figure 5, also presented high frequency: 45,66%.

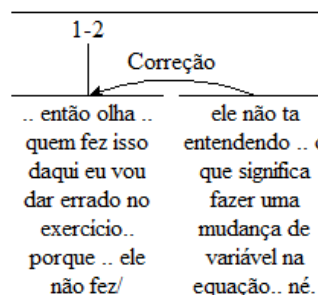


Figure 5: Interruption with repetition
Source: the authors

Corrections can replace the entire SE (rectification) or part of the SE (invalidation). The frequency of rectification and invalidation is presented in Table 3.

	N	%
Rectification	194	88,59
Invalidation	25	11,41
Total	219	100

Table 3: Extension of the correction

Invalidation presented low frequency in the *corpus* and it was used mainly to correct enunciative features, as in Figure 6:

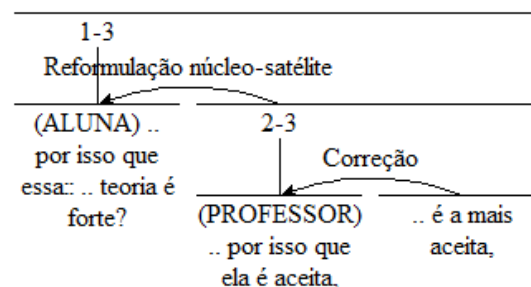


Figure 6: Invalidation
Source: the authors

Table 4 points that most of the corrections concern linguistic features. In such cases the professor restates SE after noticing some kind of phonetic/phonological, morphological or syntactic mistake. When the correction regards enunciative features, the meaning of the expression is restated.

	N	%
Linguistic features	189	86,31
Enunciative features	30	13,69
Total	219	100

Table 4: Features

Table 5 presents the degree of verbalization of the corrections.

	N	%
Totally verbalized	131	59,81
Partially verbalized	50	22,83
Projected	38	17,36
Total	219	100

Table 5: Degree of verbalization

Totally verbalized SEs present the highest frequency (59,81%), when the speaker notices the mistake only after having produced the whole SE, as in Figure 7.

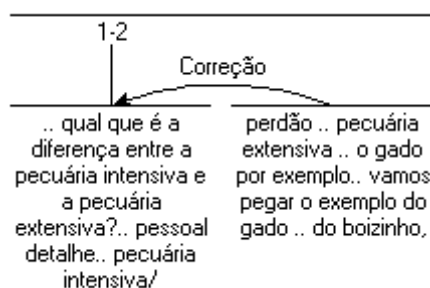


Figure 7: Totally verbalized SE

Source: the authors

Partially verbalized SEs, as in example (3), presented a lower frequency (22,83%). In such cases, the speaker notices his mistake before finishing the articulation of the SE and, consequently, does not complete it.

- (3) ... pessoal .. então como ocorre essas alterações?
 .. daonde vêm essas alterações?
 .. **daonde oco/vêm .. essas variações** entre os indivíduos de uma mesma espécie?

... people .. só how do these changes happen?
 .. where do these changes come from?
 .. **where do these changes ha/come** from among the individuals of the same species?

Projected SEs present the lowest frequency. The speaker projects an expression which can be conceived by the addressee, but does not complete it, replacing it by the RE, as in example (4).

- (4) .. Oparin diz:..a que a Terra primitiva reunia condições .. que permitiam .. a **formação de:./ .. das primeiras moléculas orgânicas.**

.. Oparin used to say that primitive Earth gathered conditions .. which allowed .. the **formation of:./ .. the first organic molecules.**

In example (4), the professor would say “*formação de moléculas orgânicas*”, but restates SE using a definite pronoun after the preposition: “*de + as: das*”.

When verbalization of the correction is partial or projected, RE and SE stay within the same intonation unit, as in examples 3 and 4. Thus, no rhetorical relation is held between RE and SE because relational propositions occur between elementary discourse units (EDUs). In this research, which analyzes spoken discourse, intonation units were taken as EDUs.

3 Conclusion

This paper aimed at analyzing formal speeches (university lectures) in Brazilian Portuguese to investigate the rhetorical relations held by text spans in which correction discourse restatement strategy was used. Correction rhetorical relation was defined by Antonio and Cassim (2012) within the framework RST, theory which was used in this research.

In the *research* corpus, correction relation is held in most of the spans in which correction strategy is used.

Regarding operationalization, all the 219 text spans with correction relation found in the *corpus* were autoinitiated and autocorrected because professors keep the conversational turn most of the time.

Regarding the realization of correction strategy, it was signaled by some lexical

expression in only 7,76% by means of expressions such as “desculpa” (sorry), “ou” (or), “eh”, “perdão” (pardon), “ou melhor” (or better) and “não” (no). Pauses and vowel prolongation presented frequency of 2,74% each and are used by the speaker to gain some time to formulate RE. Attenuated correction is the least frequent realization in the *corpus* (1,83%) and also the least marked type of correction as the speaker interrupts his/her speech smoothly when performing the correction. The most frequent realizations of correction are by means of interruption without repetition (45,66%) and interruption with repetition (45,66%).

Most of the spans in which correction was used rectified SE (88,59%), while 11,41% invalidated SE.

Most of the corrections concern linguistic features such as phonetic/phonological, morphological or syntactic mistake (86,31%). Corrections regarding enunciative features (when the meaning of the expression is restated) presented frequency of 13,69%.

Concerning degree of verbalization, totally verbalized SEs (speaker notices the mistake only after having produced the whole SE) present the highest frequency (59,81%). Partially verbalized SEs (speaker notices his mistake before finishing the articulation of the SE) presented a lower frequency (22,83%). Projected SEs (speaker projects an expression which can be conceived by the addressee, but does not complete it) present the lowest frequency. When verbalization of the correction is partial or projected, no rhetorical relation is held between RE and SE because relational propositions only occur between elementary discourse units (EDUs).

The use of RST as framework for spoken language analysis has proven to be effective. In future researches, it is expected that other discourse restatement strategies such as correction might be investigated under the scope of RST.

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