

DISCOURSE MARKERS: CONTEXTUAL INDICES OF COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Discourse markers have been approached by many linguists (Levinson, 1983, Schiffrin, 1987, Blakemore, 1987, Fraser, 1993 etc.). English like any other language presents us with a wide range of lexical items that could be interpreted as discourse markers. The latter are items whose semantic content is almost null, but whose pragmatic value is of importance in communication as they indicate and establish a relationship between the speaker and the hearer, between the addresser and the addressee. As Schiffrin¹ writes, "the analysis of discourse markers is part of the more general analysis of discourse coherence – how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meanings, and actions to make overall sense out of what is said". So discourse markers form a group of linguistic items that are inseparable from discourse and fulfil significant roles in discourse interpretation.

Keywords: *discourse marker, register, genre, communication, coherence.*

1. PREAMBLE

1.1. Discourse Analysis: Tentative Definitions

Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. "It grew out of work in different disciplines in the 1960s and early 1970s, including linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology and sociology. Discourse analysts study language in use: written texts of all kinds, and spoken data, from conversation to highly institutionalized forms of talk"².

Historically, the term has meant several things: a coherent and reasoned treatment of a subject or merely an extended treatment of a subject (though not necessarily rational), and conversation. In modern linguistics, the term has come to mean any utterance larger than the sentence; in this sense it may or may not comprise the full text in a given situation. Generally, discourse refers to the full text of an oral or

written situation; it does not denote necessarily a rational or logically coherent content; the discourse can be directed to any aim of language or refer to any kind or reality; it can be a poem, a conversation, a tragedy, a joke, a seminar discussion, a full-length history, a periodical article, an interview, a sermon, a TV ad.

A theory of discourse will then comprise an intelligible framework of different types of discourse with a treatment of the nature of each type, the organizational structure of this type, and the stylistic characteristics of such a discourse.

Discourse, therefore, is characterized by individuals acting in a special time and place; it has a beginning, middle, a closure, and a purpose; it is a language process, not a system, and it has an undivided and absolute integrity; it establishes a verbal context and it has a situational and a cultural context.

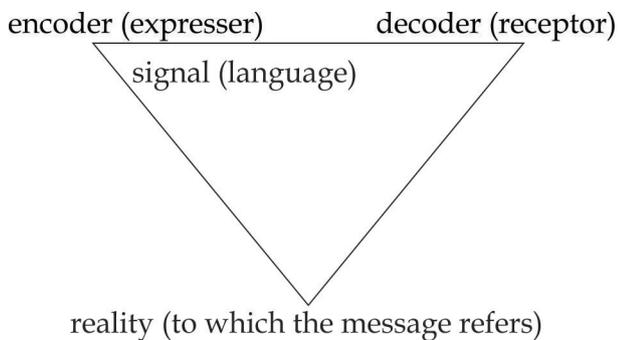
1.1.1. Foundation for the Structure of Communication

The foundations must be grounded in the very nature of the language process itself. "No imported metaphysics of structure would seem as applicable as the nature of the language act. Thus, one sound foundation for the discipline would be the so-called communication triangle, i.e., the interrelationship of expressor, receptor, and language signs as referring to reality."³

Aristotle made these factors the basis for his study of rhetoric. Because of Aristotle's influence, this structure has dominated rhetorical theory for twenty-three centuries. But many other disciplines now look upon this structure as basic: literary theory and criticism, the theory of signs, semantics and pragmatics; communicationists generally have adopted it as central to their

discipline, propaganda analysts follow the basic formulation: "Who says what to whom and why?" Katz and Fodor made it central to their theories of syntax, semantics and discourse analysis.

The structure is often represented in a triangle:



These meaningful or interpreted signals can be used by the encoder and the decoder in actual speech situations. The study of the use of these interpreted signals by encoders and decoders is called pragmatics whose sub-field Discourse Analysis is.

1.1.2. The Modes of Discourse

The second application of communication triangle to the field of discourse is that of the meaning of the discourse as reference to reality. In other words, classifications of kinds of realities referred to by full texts constitute the modes of discourse.

The kind of reality to which a discourse refers answers a question like "what is this text about?" The answer to this question could be given by categorizing the subject matter into one of the academic disciplines: "it is about physics, or ethics, or linguistics etc". Such categories would not help a theory of discourse, for the problems of physics are the concerns of physicists. More relevant to the domain of discourse would be an answer to the question of what a thing is about, like the following: "It's a story about the general's wife"; or, "It's a study of the kinds of mental abnormalities", etc. Such formulations would lead to categories like: a narrative, a series of classifications, a criticism of evaluation, and a description.

These four classes of kinds of referents are the modes of discourse.

No theory of the modes of discourse ever pretends that modes do not overlap. It is

impossible to have pure narration, description, evaluation, or classification. However, in a given discourse there will often be a dominant mode. The same principle will hold in uses of language.

The modes are important because when the modes are scientific in aim, narration becomes history, description becomes analysis, evaluation becomes criticism, and classification becomes theory.

1.1.3. The Aims of Discourse

The aims of language are the reason for the existence of all the preceding aspects of language. Sounds, morphemes, syntactic patterns, meanings of all kinds, skills in speaking and other parts of discourse, narratives and other modes of discourse - all of these exist so that humans may achieve certain purposes in their use of language with one another. Both a theory of language and a theory of discourse should be crowned with a viable framework of the uses of discourse.

The process of language, because of its components and structures, bends itself to a variety of uses. The main components of the process are, as the communication triangle illustrates, an encoder, a language signal, an ability of the signal to refer to the reality, and a decoder. The process makes it possible for any or all of these components to be emphasized in a given situation. Language can therefore be employed with the stress of the process on the persons (encoder or decoder), or the reality to which reference is made, or on the product (the text which the discourse produces). There are, consequently person discourse, reference discourse, and product discourse.

Each of these of them has its own process of thought. Each has its own logic. Each has its own organizational patterns and stylistic peculiarities. But this does not mean that science does not shade persuasion or that expression is not a component of literature. These aims overlap just as the modes of discourse do.

1.2. From Description to Explanation in Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is a study of language use beyond the sentence boundaries. Its main object

has been to understand the structure and function of language use to communicate meaning.

According to Bhatia, discourse analysis as description concentrates on the linguistic aspects of text construction and interpretation, whereas discourse analysis as explanation goes beyond such a description to rationalize conventional aspects of genre construction and interpretation, in an attempt to answer the question: why do members of a specialist community write the way they do?

Thus, we have a four-fold differentiation:

- surface-level linguistic description dealt with by register analysis;
- functional language description dealt with by grammatical-rhetorical analysis;
- language description as discourse dealt with by interactional analysis;
- language description as explanation dealt with by genre analysis.

The differentiation is very important since genre analysis, as an insightful and thick description of academic and professional texts, has become a powerful tool to arrive at significant form function correlations which can be utilized for a number of applied linguistic purposes.

1.2.1. Register Analysis

Developed by Halliday et al, register analysis focuses mainly on the identification of statistically significant lexical-grammatical features of a linguistic variety. Its goal is the discovery of specific grammatical features relevant for the respective text type.

Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens postulated that “language varies as its function varies; it differs in different situations. The name given to a variety of language distinguished according to its use is register”.

The three analysts also claimed that registers could be differentiated as sub-codes of a particular language on the basis of the frequency of lexical-grammatical features of a particular text-variety. These studies on the frequency of syntactic properties of different varieties of English are interesting and useful in the sense that they provide necessary empirical evidence to confirm or disprove some of the intuitive and impressionistic statements we tend to make

about the high or low incidence of certain syntactic features of various varieties of languages. All these observations offer, somehow, an explanation of why a particular variety takes the form that it does.

1.2.2. Grammatical – Rhetorical Analysis

Grammatical-rhetorical analysis aims to investigate the relationship between grammatical choice and rhetorical function in written English for Science and Technology. For instance, choices of tense and article are not exclusively dependent on syntactic or semantic consideration, but also involve rhetorical judgments, including the knowledge of the subject matter and its conventions. Examples from scientific discourse come to certify that whereas tense choices in general grammar of English are dependent on the notion of time, they are typically dependent on the notion of degree of generality in EST.

In grammatical-rhetorical analysis, the analyst typically tends to investigate discourse from the vantage point of the writer to consider how a scientist-communicator makes certain grammatical choices as he writes and somehow limits the level of analysis of the certain specific syntactic features of these texts.

1.2.3. Interactional Analysis

Discourse analysis as interaction represents the third level of language description.

At the heart of interactional analysis lies the notion of interpolation of discourse by the reader / listener.

It is said that discourse meaning, like, in fact, any text meaning, is not present in a piece of text ready to be consumed by the reader, but is negotiated by the “interactive” role of participants engaged in the encounter, giving specifically appropriate values to utterances.

Whether one characterizes discourse in terms of rhetorical acts, or in terms of speech function, or in terms of other communicative units like initiation, response, elicitation, or in terms of problem-solution, or the writer’s and the reader’s process, the discourse as an interactional analysis is viewed as essentially interactive in nature, being created as a result of the reader’s interpretation of the text. If grammatical-rhetorical

analysis can be referred to as the writer's discourse, discourse as interaction is the reader's discourse.

This view of discourse takes for granted that in written discourse, the writer assumes a hypothetical reader for whom he is supposed to be writing, anticipating his/her reactions and adjusting his writing accordingly, to facilitate communication. In doing so, he follows what Grice calls the co-operative principle.

This approach works reasonably well in the case of every day communicative contexts, but as far as the production and interpretation of the conventionalized academic and professional contexts are concerned, Grice's maxim needs to relax. Fairclough points out that for a satisfactory application of Gricean maxims, the participants must relate as socially equals – hence, the appearance of the concepts of speech communities and discourse communities.

The term 'Discourse community' testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups.

The notion of discourse communities is used to signify a cluster of ideas: "that language use in a group is a form of social behaviour, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that the discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group's knowledge."⁴

A speech community was seen as being composed of those who share similar linguistic rules.

According to Hymes "a speech community is defined as a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech. Such sharing comprises knowledge of at least one form of speech, and knowledge also of its patterns of use. Both conditions are necessary."⁵

1.2.4. Genre Analysis

Before getting to the definition of genre, we should first take into account Martin's approach to this concept. In his view, "genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them."⁶ They range from literary to far from literary forms: poems, narratives,

expositions, lectures, seminars, recipes, manuals, and appointment makings, service encounters, news, broadcasts and so on. So, the term genre is used to embrace each of the linguistically realized activity types.

Genre, after Swales, is a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional academic community in which it occurs. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalized with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value.

What is of extreme importance with genre is this shared set of communicative purposes which shapes the genre and gives it an internal structure. Any major change in the communicative purposes is likely to give us a different genre.

If there were only minor differences among genres there would be little need for genre analysis as a theoretical activity. But genres vary significantly along quite a number of different parameters. They vary according to the complexity of rhetorical purpose – from the ostensibly simple recipe to the ostensibly complex political speech.

They also vary greatly in the degree to which exemplars of the genre are prepared or constructed in advance of their communicative instantiation. Typical prepared genres might include research papers, letters of personal reference, poems, recipes, news broadcast and so on.

Genres also vary in terms of the mode or medium through which they are expressed; indeed the configurations of speech versus writing can become quite complex. For instance, of the previous examples of prepared genres, most are predominantly written. However, research papers can be presented at conferences in "manuscript delivery" or as "aloud reading".

Prepared – text genres vary also in the extent to which their producers are conventionally expected to consider their anticipated audiences and readerships. According to this view, writers are trying to second-guess both their readers' general state of background knowledge and their potential immediate processing problems. At the same time readers are interrogating authors on their present positions as well as trying to predict

where the authors' lines of thought or description will lead. So, there is a kind of contract binding writer and reader together in reaction and counter-reaction.

Genres also vary in the extent to which they are likely to exhibit universal or language-specific tendencies.

The notion of genre analysis is a very powerful system of analysis in that allows a far thicker description of functional varieties of written and spoken language than offered by any other system of analysis in existing literature. It takes into account not only socio-cultural but also psycho-linguistic factors, too. This kind of explanation is crucial to the understanding and construction of professional and academic genres, because it not only clarifies the communicative goals of the discourse community in question, but also the individual strategies employed by the members to achieve these goals.

2. ON DISCOURSE MARKERS

Discourse markers as a topic of study were first mentioned by Levinson, but only succinctly. The first noteworthy analysis of these linguistic items was carried out by Schiffrin. She analyzed items such as *and*, *because*, *but*, *I mean*, *now*, *oh*, *or*, *so*, *then*, *well*, and *y'know*, which occurred in unstructured conversations and spontaneous speech. The linguist advanced the idea according to which these markers chiefly fulfil three roles: 1) as contextual coordinates for utterances by locating them on one or more planes of discourse; 2) as indices of adjacent utterances to the speaker, the hearer, or both; 3) as indices of the utterance to prior and/or subsequent discourse. In her view, discourse markers serve an integrative function, contributing to discourse coherence. As a result of her work, discourse markers were defined as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk, for example, sentences or speech acts"⁷.

At about the same time, Blakemore examined some discourse markers like *and*, *after all*, *you see*, *but*, *moreover*, *furthermore* and *so*. She named them "discourse connectives". She proposed that these expressions are used to indicate how the relevance of one discourse element is dependent on another.

However, Halliday and Hasan argue that the linguistic items discussed by Schiffrin and Blakemore belong to the group of conjunctions, which are those functional categories that overtly determine the type of relationship, which exists between one sentence (or clause) and another, providing a type of formal relation between sentences: add more information to what has been said (*and*, *furthermore*, *add to that*); elaborate or exemplify it (*for instance*, *thus*, *in other words*); contrast new information with old one, or put another side to the argument (*or*, *on the other hand*, *however*, *conversely*); relate new information to what has already been given in terms of clauses (*so*, *consequently*, *because*, *for this reason*) or in time (*formerly*, *then*); indicate a new departure or a summary (*by the way*, *well*, *to sum up*, *anyway*).

In the work of Halliday and Hasan special attention is given to the six items: *now*, *of course*, *well*, *anyway*, *surely* and *after all*. They claim that these items attain significant meaning due to their phonological reduction.

If it is reduced, *now* means the opening of a new stage in the communication:

[1] *Are you ready? Now when I tell you to jump, close your eyes and jump.*⁸

Of course is used to make someone accept something the speaker knows he is likely to reject, and to suggest that something should have been obvious "but" was overlooked:

[2] *Everything's just as it was! Of course it is, said the Queen.*⁹

[3] *They were going to come to the meeting. Of course they may have changed their minds.*¹⁰

As Halliday writes, *well* occurs at the beginning of a response in a dialogue. It means either the acknowledgement of the question and readiness to give an answer or a pause:

[4] *"I'm surprised to hear that". "Are you?" "Well, I - don't see how anybody could be rude to you."*

[5] *"You haven't asked me how I happened to get away from the school before the spring term ended" "Well, I thought you'd volunteer that information - if you wanted to tell me".*

Anyway indicates cohesion with the preceding sentence by “simply brushing it aside”:

[6] *They changed over to a most peculiar kind of train which you don't see now. I've forgotten what it was called. Was it called a "steam coach"? I can't remember. Anyway it was just one coach but it ran by steam and it made a funny noise.*¹¹

Surely has the meaning of “am I right in my understanding of what's just been said?”:

[7] *They'll think you're serious. – Nobody could be so stupid as to think that, surely.*¹²

After all is used to denote the following meaning “after everything relevant has been considered, what remains is...”:

[8] *You needn't apologize. After all nobody could have known what would happen.*¹³

Clearly, Halliday's framework does not assign any other term except for “conjunctions” to the items actively participating in discourse as elements contributing to the cohesion and the interpretation of the text. Over the last several decades not only Schiffrin (1987), Blakemore (1987) and Halliday and Hasan (1992), but also some other linguists (Fraser, 1993; Andersen, 2001; Aijmer, 2002; Trujillo Saez, 2003) have enriched the research of discourse markers, which have been coined different names along the years and approaches: pragmatic markers, discourse markers, pragmatic particles, interactional signals, connectives, pragmatic expressions, small words, and so on.

Linguists are still hesitant to use one universal term for these linguistic units. Each of the proposed terms has its own particular tinge that separates it from the rest. For instance, the term “pragmatic marker”, recommended by Andersen, describes a class of short linguistic elements that usually do not have much lexical meaning but serve significant pragmatic functions in conversation. The scholar believes that the term “pragmatic” denotes the quality of “low degree of lexical specificity” and a “high degree of context-sensitivity”¹⁴. Thus, he proposes that pragmatic markers help readers/listeners “see”

the communicative aspects that go beyond the propositional meaning of an utterance. They are called “pragmatic” since they add an inferential trace to the proposition itself, making the interpretation of it easier, and narrowing the contextual background.

Many linguists favour the term discourse markers for such linguistic elements. For instance, Fraser concedes that discourse markers are expressions that indicate the relationship of the main proposition to the prior discourse, which in Andersen's view is merely the textual function of pragmatic markers, the linguist also claiming that the term “pragmatic” better describes the whole range of functions fulfilled by these items.

Aijmer uses the term “discourse particles”, defining them as “dispensable elements functioning as signposts in the communication facilitating the hearer's interpretation of the utterance on the basis of various contextual clues”¹⁵.

Fraser put forward an analysis of discourse markers as members of a pragmatic category. His definition of discourse markers is to some extent more restrictive than the one advanced by Schiffrin. According to him, each marker occurs in certain situations in a text or a conversation, each of them has a core meaning signalling how the speaker intends the role of the utterance to relate to the prior discourse. The relations that discourse markers signal include the speaker's intention to change the topic, an expression of dispreferred response (*well*), a repair of the phrase or clarification of the meaning (*I mean*), and so on.

According to Fraser, for each sentence there are potentially three types of messages:

- the basic message, which is the message transmitted when the sentence is used in direct, literal communication, and consequently signalled by basic pragmatic markers (*Please sit down*).

- the commentary message, signalled by commentary markers (*Frankly, you are mistaken*). *Frankly* indicates that the speaker is aware of the fact that the message content following will be viewed unfavourably by the addressee.

- the parallel message accompanied by parallel markers (*He put his damned shoes on the table*). *Damned* indicates that the speaker is irritated.

Furthermore, Fraser argues that discourse markers do not participate in discourse as a part of the propositional content of the sentence. They are separable and may be deleted without altering the content meaning. He considers them to be commentary, and he classifies them into the following sub-classes: discourse topic markers, discourse activity markers, and message relationship markers.

Discourse topic markers designate “what the discourse participants are talking about at any given time, including various subtopics as they arise”¹⁶. Some of these markers signal a different discourse topic (an initial, a previous one) (*before I forget, by the way, speaking of, in any case*), while others signal the “reemphasis” on the current topic (*again, in fact, now, OK, well*).

Discourse activity markers “signal discourse activity relative to some part of the foregoing discourse” (explaining, summarizing)¹⁷. The linguist identifies seven such activity types:

- clarifying: *by way of clarification, to clarify*
- conceding: *after all, all the same, at any rate etc.*
- explaining: *if I may explain, by way of explanation, to explain*
- interrupting: *if I may interrupt, to interrupt, not to interrupt*
- repeating: *at the risk of repeating myself, once again, to repeat*
- sequencing: *finally, first, in the first place, lastly, next, to begin, to continue etc.*
- summarizing: *in general, in summary, overall, so far, summing up, to sum up etc.*

Message relationship markers “signal the relationship of the basic message being conveyed by the current utterance to some prior message”¹⁸. These markers are further sub-classified into four groups: parallel, contrasting, elaborative and inferential.

Parallel markers are the most general and show that the basic message is somehow parallel to some aspect of the prior discourse (*also, alternatively, and, likewise, otherwise, similarly, too, equally etc.*).

[9] “John is sleeping in the den and I’m in the kitchen.”
“And where am I sleeping?”¹⁹

Contrastive markers belong to the second group (*all the same, but, despite, instead, never/*

nonetheless, on the contrary, otherwise, rather, regardless, still, though, well, yet etc.).

[10] “I can’t do it.” “But I know that you CAN do it.”²⁰

Elaborative markers signal that the current utterance constitutes an elaboration of an earlier one (*above all, also, besides, better, for example, for instance, furthermore, in addition, in fact, moreover, indeed, in other words etc.*).

[11] “He was fairly scared. Indeed, he was scared silly.”²¹

Inferential markers indicate that the current utterance renders a message which is, in a way, consequential to some aspect of the foregoing (*accordingly, then, therefore, as a result, of course, so, then, therefore, consequently, hence etc.*).

[12] “John is remaining. So I am leaving.”²²

We should also mention the contribution of the Spanish linguist Fernando Trujillo Saez to the study of discourse markers. According to him, discourse markers are linguistic items used by the speakers to simplify the interpretation of utterances by providing easily decodable contextual information used then by the hearer to enrich the sentence meaning. He favours the term “discourse markers” because it is “neutral between the function of connection” and the function of “the expression of modality as a way of leading the hearer towards a certain interpretation.” Following Halliday’s thought that “modal” and “conjunctive” adjuncts provide the hearer with information to enrich the word meaning, Trujillo Saez²³ classifies discourse markers into two groups: conjunctive and modal. The former (*that is, in other words, therefore, nevertheless etc.*) represent the group of linguistic items expressing textual function, while the latter (*to my mind, frankly, evidently, seriously etc.*) are similar to those with interactional function.

2.1. The Distribution of Discourse Markers

Not only the use of proper terminology to name the linguistic items in question, but also their position in a/n sentence/utterance has

been of great concern for linguists (Fraser, 1993, Bravo Cladera, 2002). As they observe, discourse markers are likely to take up the initial position in an utterance. This position is important as it functions as a hint to the status of the discourse marker; serves pragmatic and interactional purposes; contains the theme of the sentence/utterance (introduces topics, relates what is being said to the preceding text).²⁴

Nevertheless, discourse markers can be found not only in sentence/utterance initial position. Depending on the information structure they can occupy several positions: at the beginning of an utterance, as "insertions" in the utterance or at the end.

[13] "*Oh, I feel so good after my long, hot bath, I feel so good and cool and - rested!*"

[14] "*Of course he - he doesn't know - I mean I haven't informed him - of my real age!*"

[15] "*I've got to write it down - the message, I mean...*"

2.2. Discourse Markers and Proposition

In his book "*Pragmatic Markers and Sociolinguistic Variation*", Andersen questions the hypothesis that the items that are usually taken to pertain to the category of pragmatic markers (as he calls them) are external to propositions, and do not contribute to truth conditions. He also shows that some pragmatic markers may influence the truth conditions of utterances, and relates this observation to the grammaticalisations and diachronic development of the forms in question. He argues that pragmatic markers are to be interpreted in relation to propositional meaning, which proves to be essential to their interpretation, analysis and understanding. Classifying linguistic material as internal or external to propositions is often problematic. Some pragmatic markers affect the propositional meaning of utterances, though not necessarily as conceptual constituents of propositions, but as constraints on their interpretation.

The diachronic development of those items, which become pragmatic markers, is relevant to this issue. Andersen implies that their problematic status can be clarified in regard to the processes of grammaticalisation which they are implicated

in. From the point of view of grammaticalisation, pragmatic markers are seen as expressions which, through recurring use and routinization, have developed non-propositional meanings of a more abstract nature than their original lexical meanings through processes of conventionalisation of implicatures and increased subjectification.

Aijmer also contends that many of the characteristics of discourse markers (particularly their multifunctionality) can be accounted for as a result of grammaticalisation. Aijmer defines *grammaticalization* (grammatical transformation) as the process "whereby lexical items or phrases come through frequent use in certain highly constrained local contexts to be reanalyzed as having syntactic and morphological functions, and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop grammaticalized functions"²⁵. He exemplifies the process of grammaticalisation of *indeed*, which becomes "integrated into the relatively tight lexical field of epistemic sentence-adverbs"²⁶ with the meaning "certainly". Then it acquires a contrastive function, especially after *but*. As a clause-initial discourse marker *indeed* has meanings which augment the elaboration and the clarification of the discourse intent. Discourse markers' development from adverbs, on the one hand, reflects a tendency to use the propositional material for the purposes of creating texts and indicating attitudes in discourse situations, and on the other hand results in an increase of the pragmatic significance and expressiveness.

Following the tradition of pragmatists such as Austin, Grice, Searle and Sperber and Wilson, Andersen sustains that utterances are accountable in terms of propositions and the attitudes towards them. Generally, those markers which have a lexical history are more problematic. The pragmatic markers which have developed from items with conceptual meanings, and which have not been fully grammaticalised are the ones that are likely to be difficult to characterize in terms of propositionality (*like, sort of, kind of, you know, you see, and especially just*).

The use of discourse markers for indicating various types of conversational moves is very common in dialogue although quite rare in expository text. We notice differences not only between a conversation and a written text, but

also between the functions discourse markers exhibit in these two types of discourse. It is unquestionably reasonable that a single discourse marker can have more than one function. Some surveys assign the role of cohesive devices to discourse markers, others focus on their role as speaker attitude expressions, yet others believe that they are devices for acknowledging and highlighting the speaker-hearer relationship, and increasing politeness.

Andersen claims that discourse markers are not only multifunctional in the sense that they can have different pragmatic functions in different contexts; they are also multifunctional in the sense that they can take up multiple functions in one and the same context. Consequently, discourse markers as any other structural words carry out certain functions in discourse.

2.3. Discourse Functions

According to the functional criterion, Aijmer separates these linguistic elements into two groups: textual and interpersonal. Yet, Andersen²⁷ contends that the distinction of discourse markers according to the textual and interpersonal functional domains would be “ineffectual as taxonomic framework, because the textual and interpersonal functions of markers can be shown to be concurrent”.

The latter proposes a conceptualization of discourse markers in which the function of a particular item can be depicted as a synthesis of three basic aspects of pragmatic meaning: subjective, interactional and textual. We find Andersen’s view more appropriate as it gives the most comprehensive functional categorisation of pragmatic/discourse markers. Andersen describes the functional complexity of this category in terms of the well-known notions of subjective, interactional and textual functions.

2.3.1. The Subjective Function

Andersen²⁸ contends that all markers evince a degree of subjectivity “since any utterance expresses a speaker’s intention to make something manifest to an individual”. He further sustains that “discourse markers generally tell the hearer what sort of inferential processes the utterance

interpretation involves and are used to manipulate the process of context selection”. Therefore, we may say that discourse markers clarify the relation that exists between a communicated assumption and the interlocutors’ cognitive environment.

Thus, markers may be used not only to convey how the speaker perceives the information encoded by a proposition, but also how the speaker perceives the communicative situation and his/her conversational and social relation with the hearer. Sometimes, markers may also convey the relation that exists between certain units of discourse (propositions, sentences). The task of identifying which functions discourse markers complete requires pragmatic inference, which is governed by the relevance principle and may be constrained by procedural hints such as intonation and voice tone. Consequently, interactional functions cannot be separated from subjectivity. Both are part of the communicative content of utterances and part of the speaker’s informative intention. As the linguist claims²⁹, “interactional features are to be understood as functional properties that concern the mutuality of context between speaker and hearer, and may be concerned with saving hearer’s face, drawing the hearer into the discourse and expressing empathy towards him/her.”

Another function that cannot be separated from subjectivity is the textual function. A speaker who informs his/her hearer that proposition A should be interpreted as a premise, while proposition B is a conclusion, also expresses his/her subjective conviction that such an interpretation is the one which becomes extremely relevant.

We are entitled thus to say that subjectivity is of high importance both for interactional and textual functions. Lyons has defined subjectivity as “the way in which natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent’s expression of himself and of his attitudes and beliefs”³⁰.

The subjective function of discourse markers captures and clarifies the attitudinal relation that exists between the speaker and the utterance proposition. Subjectivity is a non-structural feature of discourse markers which encompasses a number of different types of meaning, such as

the speaker's way of thinking, his/her affective attitude and his/her evaluation of the newsworthiness of the propositional content. For instance, tentativeness or assertiveness can be expressed by discourse markers such as *I guess*, *I mean*, *absolutely*, which entail various degrees of endorsement of proposition.

2.3.2. The Interpersonal/Interactional Function

Markers with an interpersonal function convey attitudes, feelings and evaluations. They are hearer-oriented (*you know*). According to Andersen, this notion includes several dimensions: "epistemic commitment", ranging from full endorsement to full rejection of propositional meaning, "affective evaluation", ranging from positive to negative evaluation of propositional meaning, and "newsworthiness", ranging from predictable to unpredictable propositional meaning.

The interactional function also accounts for the ability of discourse markers to indicate the degree of shared experience and knowledge and logical relations between a communicated assumption and a speaker's knowledge, that is, whether he/she expresses an assumption that contradicts or supports the existing assumptions. The interactional function cannot be separated from the understanding of the propositional meaning of the utterance. What is expressed by an utterance falls into two parts: what is said and what is implied. So the sentence or the utterance meaning can be analysed into two types of encoded information: content meaning and pragmatic meaning (conversational implicature in Grice's terms). Content meaning is sometimes referred to as "propositional meaning". It comprises the actual situation about which the speaker is talking. It is what the sentence is about. Pragmatic meaning, unlike the content meaning, supplies additional signals for the interpretation of the direct communication.

When analysing discourse markers we are likely to pay more attention to the pragmatic meaning of an utterance. In other terms, the literal meaning of an utterance is its locutionary force, and the intended or understood meaning is the illocutionary force of the utterance. So,

discourse markers are considered to be illocutionary force indicating devices.

Discourse markers, as mentioned above, are hearer-orientated due to their interactional function. Hence, they may convey empathy towards the listener, happiness to see him/her (*Oh, Stella!*), an attempt to involve the hearer into the conversation (*right?*), and so forth.

Traditionally, discourse markers are presented as non-contributors to the propositional meaning of an utterance. However, some of them do have conceptual meanings (*I mean*, *You know*, *I guess*) which does not allow them to be omitted in the proposition.

Discourse markers are also frequently connected to speech act and politeness functions. They may be used as: conversational openers (*well*); turn-taking devices (*well*, *oh*, *I think*); hesitational fillers (*well..*, *uh*); backchannels (*okay*, *mm*, *huh*); topic shift devices (*well*, *now*); receiving information devices (*well*, *mm-hmm*); politeness devices (*I'm afraid*).

The interactional function of discourse markers can be associated with the social functions of language, such as the interlocutors' mutual recognition of the conversational relationship and the expression of solidarity and politeness. Nevertheless, politeness cannot be firmly associated with the interactional function. For instance, a speaker expressing him/herself in cautious terms may not be expressing strong commitment to the proposition expressed, as it may be that he/she wants to circumvent sounding too assertive and apply a non-imposing tactic, which is a case of negative politeness and concerns the speaker's relation to the proposition expressed, namely it is subjective.

Meaningful markers which display an interactional function like *right?*, *huh?*, *you know* aim at engaging the hearer and asking for his/her contribution. *Right* can be considered "emphatic" in the sense of "involving" the listener" or "facilitative" in the sense of being "used to facilitate the participation of others". *You know* is commonly used without attempting to ask for the hearer's contribution.

The interactional meaning heartens the hearer to talk due to its hearer-orientation. Consequently, discourse markers with interactional functions can often be associated with directive speech

acts. In Aijmer's view, face-saving, politeness and indirectness are typical of everyday conversation and are thus involved in the usage of discourse markers with interpersonal function. *Sort of* and tags like *and that sort of thing*, which have meanings like imprecision, approximation, seem to point at the speaker's desire to decrease the social distance between him/herself and the addressee.

Aijmer embraces the view that discourse markers with an interactional function "perform a phatic function in the discourse, underlying the interactive structure of the conversation"³¹. Phatic markers can be considered items expressing attitudes or modes of knowledge. For example, *I think* refers to the mode of knowledge/belief, showing that "something goes beyond expectation", while *sort of* indicates that "knowledge has less than optimal codability"³².

Andersen also takes into consideration the relevance theory according to which a person may differentiate between information that is relevant because it supports existing conceptual assumption and that which is relevant because it contradicts existing assumptions. Discourse markers are helpful for exposing the incidence of these inferential processes and supply overt signals involved in the interpretation process. They can be used to convey agreement or disagreement, belief or disbelief, endorsement or rejection, conviction or doubt, and they can mark information as new or old, surprising or trivial, etc. What is common to all these dichotomies is that they may illustrate how a communicated idea relates to the cognitive environment of a speaker, whether it supports or contradicts his/her belief.

In conclusion, we may say that discourse markers fulfilling an interactional function pertain to the conversational register. Speakers resort to discourse markers to request attention, to presume shared knowledge (*you know*), to request confirmation (*right, OK*), to clarify something (*I mean*), or to introduce an elaboration or explanation as a part of an answer to a question (*now*). The hearer, in his/her turn may react via discourse markers signalling comprehension (*OK*) or a change of knowledge status (*oh*), or irony (*huh?*).

2.3.3. The Textual Function

According to Halliday the textual function is concerned with the textual resources the speaker has for generating coherence. A common feature of many discourse markers consists in their ability to overtly mark how communicated ideas cohere with a context.

The textual properties of discourse markers, in Schiffrin's view, refer to the relation between sequentially arranged segments in discourse, that is, between one proposition and the next proposition, between one utterance and the following utterance, between speakers' turns, between discourse topics etc.

Discourse markers displaying textual functions, such as *and, therefore* and *moreover* show how the speaker perceives the relation between propositions A and B.

One cannot but associate discourse markers with textuality. Schiffrin³³ defines them as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk". That is, they function as "discourse glue", providing structure and coherence. Let us take for instance, *and* which encompasses predominantly a textual meaning, coordinating linguistic units at different levels and indicating parallel processing.

As it might be expected, the main functions discharged by discourse markers overlap in different contexts. *Well* is a good example of such an interrelation. On the one hand, it operates as a text-structuring device on the textual level. On the other hand, it is employed in conversations to point to the speaker/hearer relationship. The two functions occur simultaneously, but one of them prevails over the other.

There are also markers which slightly contribute to textuality, but whose main scope is a subjective or an interactional one (*I suppose*).

As Schiffrin very well articulates, no matter how discourse markers might be defined as devices for marking transition points in discourse, or as devices drawing hearer to a change in discourse structure, or as devices marking movement between two discourse units, they are the "conversational glue" that participants efficiently use to cohere the dialogue or written text together at various communicative levels.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Discourse markers clarify not only the relation holding between a communicated proposition and an interlocutor's cognitive environment but also between propositions or other discourse units. Each of their functions eases the communicational process. Discourse markers displaying a subjective function specify the relations between the speaker and the communicated proposition. The ones with an interactional function signal what the speaker perceives as the hearer's relation to a communicated proposition and the degree of mutual manifestness. Finally, discourse markers evincing a textual function express what the speaker perceives as the relation between propositions or other discourse units.

This multifunctionality of discourse markers seems to be essential, yet we cannot maintain that it manifests concurrently, or that the three functions subjective, interactional and textual are inseparable.

Thus, discourse markers should be considered a multifaceted group of items, whose meanings and functions may overlap, but whose aim is constant, namely to facilitate communication.

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Endnotes

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