



THE FUNCTIONS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL

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ABSTRACT

Discourse markers play a significant role in obtaining the communicative goals of socially oriented language both in spoken and written discourse. The skillful use of discourse markers often indicates a higher level of fluency in both spoken and written English. Our present research is dedicated to study the discourse markers in terms of their functional domains. Besides we will outline our analysis of classification of discourse markers according to both their meaning and functions in one type of newspaper genres, namely in editorial.

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So discourse markers form a group of linguistic items that are inseparable from discourse and fulfill significant roles in discourse interpretation. Let us review what we understand as "a discourse". In his online article Richard Nordquist, Professor in Georgia Southern University, suggest that "in linguistics, *discourse* refers to a unit of language longer than a single sentence. More broadly, *discourse* is the use of spoken or written language in a social context." Besides he regards Dutch linguist Teun van Dijk, the author of "The Handbook of Discourse Analysis" (1985), as the "founding father" of contemporary discourse studies. (<https://www.thoughtco.com/discourse-language-term-1690464>). *Discourse* is a fashionable word which is used by authors in radically different views of what *discourse* is and the way that the term ought to be used (Richardson 2007, 21). For Cameron (2001, 17), *discourse* "is not pure content, not just a window on someone's mental or social world"; it is "a form of language with certain characteristics which are dictated by the way language and communication work".

Discourse markers (DMs) serve as an object of investigation in the last few decades. Schiffrin (1987) defined DM as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of discourse" (Schiffrin, 1987:1). She analyzed 11 discourse markers meticulously: *and, because,*

but, I mean, now, oh, or, so, then, well and *y'know* as they occur in unstructured interview conversations and spontaneous speech. According to Fraser (1993) who labeled them as “pragmatic markers”, DMs (i) are linguistic expressions with their core meaning that can be enriched by the context; (ii) signal how speaker intends the role of the utterance to relate it to the prior discourse.

Owing to the understanding of the function of DMs, different approaches have been developed. The most influential proposals are from systemic functional grammar (SFG) founded by Halliday and Hasan (1973), the coherence model developed by Schiffrin (1987), grammatical pragmatic perspective proposed by Fraser (1987), the Relevance Theory adopted from pragmatics by Blakemore (1992). Despite the large disagreement in the area of DMs studies, it is possible, as Schourup (1999, 230) argues, “to identify a small set of characteristics on which nearly all variant uses of the term DM draw selectively and with varying emphasis”. The different studies of DMs also distinguish several domains where they may be functional, in which there are included *textual, attitudinal, cognitive, and interactional* parameters (Castro, 2009, 60). Most of the studies of functional domains of DMs are based on Halliday’s language functions (1973): *ideational, interpersonal and textual*. For instance, Brinton (1996), Ajimer (2002), Hyland and Tse (2004), Muller (2005) classify DMs into the functional headings of two main categories: *interpersonal* and *textual*. According to Hyland and Tse (2004, 162), textual discourse markers refer to the organization of discourse, while the interpersonal ones reflects the writer’s stance towards the content of the text and the potential reader. They can be also multifunctional serving both textual and interpersonal functions.

Particles with an interpersonal function express attitudes, feelings and evaluations. In other words, they are *hearer-oriented* (e.g. *you know*). Interpersonal functions of DMs adapted from Brinton (1996, 35-40) are presented in Castro’s (2009, 61) research. They consist of subjective functions and interpersonal functions:

☒ Subjectively, to express a response to the preceding discourse including also back-channel signals of understanding and continued attention while another speaker is having his/her turn (response/reaction markers; back-channel signals).

☒ Interpersonally, to effect cooperation or sharing, including confirming shared assumptions, checking or expressing understanding, requesting confirmation, expressing difference or saving face (confirmation-seekers, face-savers).

The *interpersonal* model of metadiscourse functions, proposed by Hyland (2013, 77), is comprised of the two dimensions of interaction: *the interactive* and the *interactional dimension*. *The interactive resources* are divided by Hyland (2013, 78) into five broad categories: transition markers (*additive, adversative, causative*), frame markers (e.g., *finally, to conclude*), endophoric markers (e.g., *noted above*), evidentials (e.g., *according to*), code glosses (e.g., *in other words*). There are five subcategories of interactional markers presented by Hyland (2013, 80): hedges (e.g., *perhaps, possible*), boosters (e.g., *in fact, it is clear that*), attitude markers (e.g., *unfortunately, surprisingly*), engagement markers (e.g., *you can see that*), self- mentions (e.g., *I, we, my*).

For Halliday (1994), *the textual function* is realized in the theme focus structure of discourse, in the distribution of given and new information, and in cohesive relations. A very general characteristic of many discourse markers is their ability to mark explicitly how

communicated ideas cohere with a context. As regards the textual functions, they contribute to coherence and textuality in discourse. The cohesive relations which correspond to DMs are *conjunctive relations* which relate text elements together. The classification of *conjunctive relations* into *additive, adversative, causal, and temporal* is adopted by many researchers in the area of discourse analysis.

Analysis. An editorial used for our research is taken from “The New York Times”, printed under the headline of “Socialism and self-Made Woman” in 28th February, 2019. The word count of the editorial is 867 out of which 25 different DMs were identified. However, there is a variety in the utilization frequency of each DM. Total number of DMs utilization was 35 and from this 21 usage of DMs comes in textual function while 14 in interpersonal function.

(Table 1)

Functions of DM	Types of DM	Occurrence
Textual discourse markers	And	4
	But	3
	So	2
	Although, also, or, now, in fact, for example, in any case, after all, by the way, in other words, on the contrary, by contrast	1
	15	21
Interpersonal discourse markers	More likely	4
	Exactly	2
	Less likely, you see, O.K., Let's, truly, really, in fact, look	1
	10	14
	25	35

According to the table, DMs such as *and, but* and *so* are more frequently used by the writer to provide coherence in the text while the markers such as *more like, exactly* are dominantly used to express writer's attitude to the utterance. In terms of their meaning, each DM presuppose different functions.

With regard to textual markers, some of them signal to the semantic relations of the text. For example, *and, also* and *or* signal the utterance following includes additional information to the preceding discourse.

Example:

- *We know a lot about upward mobility in different countries, **and** the facts are not what Republicans want to hear.*
- *We'd **also** see cuts in funding for public education.*

DMs such as *but, although, on the contrary* and *by contrast* express contrastive relationship between sentences.

Example:

- *And the association between “socialism” and social mobility isn’t an accident. **On the contrary**, it’s exactly what you would expect.*

DMs like *so, after all* and *by the way* show that the current utterance conveys a message which is, in some sense, consequential to some aspect of the prior sentence.

Example:

- ***After all**, huge disparities in parents’ income tend to translate into large disparities in children’s opportunities.*

In other words and *for example* are used in the function of verification or exemplification in the editorial.

Example:

- ***In other words**, they have what Republicans denounce as “socialism”.*

When it comes to interpersonal DMs, the one of the most frequent ones was *exactly* that shows writer’s certainty to present information with other markers such as *in fact, truly* and *really*.

Example:

- ***On the contrary**, it’s exactly what you would expect.*

More likely and *less likely* express the degree of possibility of the information given.

Example:

- *And those who are born affluent are, correspondingly, **more likely** to keep their status.*

More importantly, the DMs such as *you see, O.K., Let’s* and *look* shows the writer’s attempt to engage the reader to the information.

Example:

- ***Look**, Ms. Trump is surely right in asserting that most of us want a country in which there is the potential for upward mobility.*

To sum up, the DMs in the editorials fulfill a number of textual and interpersonal functions which contribute to the management of the discourse and engagement of the readers by noticing and evaluating the text material. Taking into consideration the use of DMs in this genre, the most frequent of them fulfill textual functions. However, the interpersonal functions are of the considerable importance owing to their influence on the readers.

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