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THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN MAINTAINING COHERENCE AND MANAGING INTERACTION IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

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Abstract: *Discourse markers play a significant role in organizing spoken discourse and facilitating effective communication between speakers. Unlike content words, discourse markers primarily perform pragmatic and interactional functions, helping speakers establish connections between utterances, signal transitions, express attitudes, manage turn-taking, and maintain the coherence of conversation. This article examines the role of discourse markers in maintaining coherence and managing interaction in spoken English.*

Keywords: *discourse markers, spoken English, discourse coherence, interaction, pragmatics, conversation, turn-taking, cohesion*

NGLIZ TILIDA OG‘ ZAKI MA’LUMOTLARNING IJROCHILIKNI SAQLASH VA O‘ ZARO TA’SIRNI BOSHQARISHDAGI DISCURS BELGILARINING ROLI

Annotatsiya: *Discurse markerlari og‘ zaki nutqni tashkil qilishda va ma’ruzachilar o‘ rtasida samarali muloqotni osonlashtirishda muhim rol o‘ ynaydi. Mazmun so‘ zlaridan farqli o‘ laroq, nutq markerlari asosan pragmatik va interaktiv funktsiyalarni bajaradi, ma’ruzachilarga gaplar o‘ rtasida aloqalarni o‘ rnatishga, signal o‘ tishlariga, munosabatlarni ifoda etishga, navbatni boshqarishga va suhbatning izchilligini saqlashga yordam beradi. Ushbu maqolada nutq markerlarining og‘ zaki ingliz tilida izchillikni saqlash va o‘ zaro ta’sirni boshqarishdagi roli ko‘ rib chiqiladi.*

Kalit so‘ zlar: *nutq markerlari, og‘ zaki ingliz tili, nutq izchilligi, o‘ zaro ta’sir, pragmatika, suhbat, navbatni olish, uyg‘ unlik*

РОЛЬ ДИСКУРНЫХ МАРКЕРОВ В ПОДДЕРЖАНИИ СВЯЗИ И УПРАВЛЕНИИ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕМ В УСТНОЙ АНГЛИЙСКОЙ РЕЧИ

Аннотация: *Дискурсивные маркеры играют важную роль в организации устной речи и обеспечении эффективной коммуникации между говорящими. В отличие от содержательных слов, дискурсивные маркеры в первую очередь выполняют прагматические и интеракционные функции, помогая говорящим устанавливать связи между высказываниями, сигнализировать о переходах, выражать отношение, управлять сменой реплик и поддерживать связность разговора. В данной статье рассматривается роль дискурсивных маркеров в поддержании связности и управлении взаимодействием в устной английской речи.*

Ключевые слова: *дискурсивные маркеры, устная английская речь, связность дискурса, взаимодействие, прагматика, разговор, смена реплик, когезия*

Introduction

Spoken communication differs considerably from written communication because it is produced spontaneously and involves continuous interaction between speakers. In everyday conversation, speakers frequently use short expressions such as *well, so, you know, I mean, actually, right,* and *anyway*. These expressions do not always contribute directly to the propositional meaning of an utterance; nevertheless, they perform important discourse and pragmatic functions. The term *discourse marker* has been defined in different ways within discourse analysis and pragmatics. Schiffrin describes discourse markers as sequentially dependent elements that contribute to the coherence of discourse. Fraser, in turn, views discourse markers as linguistic expressions that signal a relationship between the interpretation of the current segment and the preceding discourse. These approaches emphasize that discourse markers should be understood not merely as grammatical elements but as pragmatic devices operating at the level of discourse.

In spoken English, coherence is constructed collaboratively. Speakers need to indicate relationships between ideas, introduce or change topics, respond to previous contributions, and signal how their utterances should be interpreted. Discourse markers provide speakers with linguistic resources for accomplishing these tasks. For example, the marker *well* can introduce a response that does not directly conform to the previous speaker's expectation:

A: Did you enjoy the conference?

B: Well, it was interesting, but it was quite tiring.

Here, *well* does not add substantial propositional information. Instead, it signals that the response requires some qualification. Similarly, *so* may indicate a consequence or introduce a new stage in the conversation, while *anyway* may signal a return to the main topic.

The study addresses the following research questions:

What are the most common discourse functions of discourse markers in spoken English?

How do discourse markers contribute to interactional coherence?

How do speakers use discourse markers to manage conversational interaction?

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the pragmatic and interactional functions of discourse markers in spoken English. The analysis is based on conversational examples representing common patterns of informal spoken interaction. The selected discourse markers include *well, so, but, you know, I mean, actually, anyway,* and *right*. These items were selected because they frequently occur in conversational discourse and may perform several different functions depending on their position and context.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, examples containing discourse markers were identified. Second, each marker was examined in relation to the surrounding discourse. Finally, the examples were categorized according to their primary discourse function.

The following functional categories were used:

Topic management – introducing, shifting, or returning to a topic;

Sequential organization – indicating relationships between preceding and following utterances;

Turn management – helping speakers initiate, maintain, or conclude a turn;

Hedging and mitigation – reducing the directness or potential face-threatening effect of an utterance;

Clarification and reformulation – correcting, explaining, or reformulating previously expressed information;

Attitudinal and interpersonal functions – expressing the speaker's stance and managing the relationship between participants.

The study does not assume that each discourse marker has one fixed meaning. Instead, its interpretation is considered dependent on its linguistic and conversational context.

Results

The analysis demonstrates that discourse markers perform several interconnected functions in spoken English. They contribute to discourse coherence at both textual and interactional levels.

Discourse markers as organizers of information: One of the most important functions of discourse markers is to organize information and establish relationships between discourse segments. Markers such as *so, therefore, but,* and *anyway* help listeners interpret the relationship between different parts of a conversation.

For example:

We missed the first bus, **so** we decided to take a taxi.

In this example, *so* explicitly signals a resultative relationship between two events. The listener can therefore process the second clause as a consequence of the first.

The marker *but*, by contrast, signals contrast:

I wanted to go with them, **but** I had to finish my work.

Thus, discourse markers make relationships between propositions more transparent and contribute to the logical development of discourse.

Discourse markers and topic management: Spoken conversations often involve sudden topic changes or returns to previously discussed issues. Discourse markers enable speakers to signal these transitions.

The marker *anyway* is particularly useful in this respect:

Anyway, what were you saying about your new project?

Here, *anyway* indicates that the speaker intends to move away from the current topic and return to a previous conversational thread.

Similarly, *so* may introduce a new topic or question:

So, how did your interview go?

In this context, *so* does not express a simple logical consequence. Instead, it functions as a discourse-organizing device that moves the conversation forward.

Discourse markers and reformulation: Markers such as *I mean* are frequently used to reformulate or clarify what has previously been said.

For example:

He's quite difficult to work with. **I mean**, he doesn't really listen to other people.

The expression *I mean* indicates that the speaker is expanding or clarifying the preceding statement. It allows the speaker to modify the interpretation of an earlier utterance and helps the listener understand the intended meaning.

This function is especially important in spontaneous speech, where speakers may begin an utterance before completely formulating their ideas.

Interpersonal and attitudinal functions: Discourse markers can communicate the speaker's attitude toward the proposition or toward the interlocutor. Expressions such as *you know, actually, well,* and *I mean* can indicate uncertainty, involvement, emphasis, agreement, disagreement, or shared knowledge.

For example:

It's a difficult situation, **you know**.

Here, *you know* may invite the listener to recognize or share the speaker's perspective. It contributes to interpersonal involvement rather than simply connecting two propositions.

The results therefore indicate that discourse markers operate simultaneously at several levels. They organize information, establish connections between utterances, regulate interaction, and express interpersonal meanings.

Discussion

The findings support the view that discourse markers are multifunctional elements that contribute significantly to the organization of spoken discourse. Their importance cannot be explained solely in terms of grammatical structure because many of their functions emerge from the interactional context.

One important finding is that discourse coherence in spoken English is not exclusively a matter of logical connections between sentences. Coherence is also constructed through interaction. Speakers need to demonstrate how their utterances relate to previous contributions and how they expect listeners to interpret them. Discourse markers provide explicit signals for these relationships. The marker *well*, for example, may signal hesitation, disagreement, qualification, or a transition to a response. Its interpretation depends heavily on the surrounding context. This demonstrates the pragmatic flexibility of discourse markers. Another important observation concerns the difference between cohesion and coherence. Cohesive devices create formal linguistic connections, whereas discourse markers can contribute to the listener's interpretation of the communicative relationship between utterances. A marker such as *anyway* may not establish a grammatical connection between clauses, but it can clearly indicate how the speaker is organizing the conversation.

The results have implications for English language teaching. Learners who possess extensive grammatical and lexical knowledge may nevertheless experience difficulties in natural conversation if they do not understand how discourse markers function. Explicit instruction in expressions such as *well, you know, I mean, actually, so,* and *anyway* can therefore help learners produce more natural and coherent spoken English.

Conclusion

This study has examined the role of discourse markers in maintaining coherence and managing interaction in spoken English. The analysis demonstrates that discourse markers perform a wide range of functions, including organizing information, managing topics, regulating turn-taking, mitigating disagreement, reformulating information, and expressing interpersonal attitudes. The findings suggest that discourse markers are essential components of natural spoken interaction. Their contribution to coherence extends beyond the connection of ideas: they also help speakers negotiate meaning, coordinate conversational turns, and maintain appropriate interpersonal relationships.

Consequently, discourse markers should be regarded as important pragmatic resources in both discourse analysis and English language pedagogy. A better understanding of their functions can help learners develop not only grammatical accuracy but also pragmatic competence and conversational fluency.

Future research could investigate discourse markers in larger spoken corpora and compare their use across different varieties of English, age groups, professional contexts, and levels of language proficiency. Such research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how discourse markers contribute to the dynamic construction of spoken interaction.

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