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语篇与口语水平

——语篇标记在二语口语产生中的角色

魏明 著

对外经济贸易大学出版社

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Discourse and Oral Proficiency:
The Role of Discourse Markers in Second Language Speech Production

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总　　序

对外经济贸易大学出版社最新推出了大型外语学术专著系列——《当代外国语言文学学术文库》，邀请我为文库写序，借此机会，谈谈我个人对外国语言文学研究的一些认识和感受。

综观21世纪的外国语言文学研究，就语言学研究而言，形式语言学理论和功能语言学理论继续对抗和对话，认知语言学理论和社会文化理论发展迅速，各种语言学的理论思潮试图从不同的角度解释语言事实；在应用方面，语言学更加广泛地与多学科交叉，运用和借鉴包括数理逻辑、计算机科学、心理学、神经科学、认知科学、生态科学、经济学等各学科在内的研究成果和方法，不断凸显出语言学作为人文科学和自然科学交叉学科的地位。就文学研究而言，英美文学研究受经济全球化浪潮的冲击，文学及文论研究都关注文化全球化与本土性的关系。文化全球化的研究引发了文学现代性、后现代性和后殖民性的思考，文学和语言学研究的相互影响和交融日益明显，文学研究越来越多地引入语言学研究的方法，如话语分析等，反之亦然。我国的外国语言文学研究在全球化和中国入世以后与国际学术界的交流更加密切，发展更加迅速。

同时，我们仍清楚地看到，国内的外国语言文学研究依然存在“三张皮”现象，第一张皮是“汉语与外语”研究的合作与交流不够；第二张皮是“语言与文学”研究的沟通与对话不够；第三张皮是“英语与其他外语”研究的来往和交叉不够，“三张皮”极大地阻碍着外国语言文学学科的发展。

这套文库的设计体现了兼收并蓄、博采众长、学科融通的思想，是一

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个开放和创新的学术平台，是各种研究的阵地，各位学者的家园，进入文库的研究成果都经过精心挑选，出自学有专长的博士和学者。我衷心地祝愿这朵“原创的小花”在繁花似锦的学术花园里开得绚丽灿烂，愿更多的学者关心和呵护它。

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2012 年 6 月 1 日于北京望京花园

Preface

Discourse markers (DMs) have been increasingly recognized as an integral part of coherent discourse in context, which contribute to the comprehension and co-construction of the communicative process. It has been solidly established that they function in the metalinguistic domain beyond the description of traditional semantic and syntactic approaches. Research has provided a great deal of theoretical and practical support that these expressions function beyond propositional content and have an important effect on how discourse proceeds by integrating discourse units or pointing to social involvement in verbal communication.

Discourse markers have been approached from multiple perspectives, which enrich our knowledge of discourse, language processing and the relation between language and society. Although no consensus has been reached as to what should be considered discourse markers and in what ways they function as coherence builders, their salient function in discourse organization has triggered vast research interests in the way they affect verbal interaction. Most work agrees that discourse markers are devices that either move the discourse forward smoothly by helping people understand the interrelatedness of various discourse units, or index social and interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, existing research mostly studied individual DMs, rather than treating DMs as a well-defined category functioning at specified levels.

A major strand in discourse marker research is the way discourse markers affect oral communication. Discourse markers have been shown to improve people's understanding of a conversation as a coherent whole. In addition to a discourse structuring function, they are also useful conversational devices that ensure that language is used in socially and situationally appropriate ways. In particular, some linguistic expressions have been found typically associated with spoken interaction. They facilitate the natural development of the interaction and assist people in managing and understanding the conversation flow.

Because of their importance in verbal communication, discourse markers constitute an intrinsic part of one's communicative competence. Various aspects of communicative competence may involve the use of discourse markers which are both pragmatically valuable and socially sensitive and are therefore closely associated with communicative effectiveness. Therefore, it is necessary to use a model that embodies both the textual and interactional domains of discourse marker use in spoken discourse because it reflects the ability of participants to tie their discourse not only to the linguistic environment but also to the interactional context.

The role of discourse markers in communicative competence sparked a concern about their relevance to second and foreign language learning. Much of existing research compared the use of discourse markers of nonnative speakers to that of native speakers with the starting point that native speakers serve as a point of reference for learners. Such research provides valuable pedagogical insights, which evaluate learners' language capability in terms of how close discourse marker use is to native speakers. Nevertheless, little empirical evidence is known as to whether discourse markers are a linguistic parameter that distinguishes different levels of speaking performance, although existing evidence leads to the assumption that effective use of discourse markers positively relates to oral proficiency ratings. Furthermore, there is hardly any work on how various speaking tasks and contexts can affect learners' discourse marker performance. Such information may be useful in the effort to improve learners' discourse management skills. Since it is believed that the presence and use of discourse markers may be part of the reason why some texts are more successful than others and why some participants appear more communicatively competent than others, the features identified with more advanced speakers can be encouraged in the classroom for learners to develop their competence in spoken interaction.

Another area in existing research that is relatively underexplored is the use of DMs in the Chinese context. This context is of particular interest because it has the largest population learning English as a foreign language. The teaching and learning of English in China has been largely exam-oriented and used to neglect speaking and listening. With a growing emphasis on communicative

competence in English education in the past decade, the importance of speaking and listening have been increasingly recognized; as a result, speaking has been included as an integral component of more and more exams. A washback effect of this is that English oral proficiency has been drawing unprecedented attention from teachers and learners alike. Nevertheless, the reality is that at present a substantial proportion of college-level learners are not able to achieve the oral proficiency desirable for effective communication, which frustrates both teachers and learners. In light of the functions of discourse markers in spoken interaction, detailed and comprehensive descriptions and analyses of discourse markers from the perspective of how they help achieve textual and interpersonal coherence may generate an in-depth understanding of the use of the English language by Chinese learners.

The study presented in this book builds on the proposition that by uncovering what more proficient learners, as opposed to less proficient learners, tend to do in the production of spoken discourse, communication problems of language learners can be partly addressed through incorporating the differences into L2 teaching and learning. It attempted to seek discrepancies, if any, through quantitative and qualitative analyses, between the two proficiency groups in their use of discourse markers. It is believed that the use of discourse markers, if found to be a discriminating factor in the quality of students' oral performance, should be part of speaking class syllabi.

This book will be of interest to discourse analysts, second language acquisition researchers, English teaching specialists and anyone who is concerned with the oral proficiency of learners of English as a second/foreign language. It is comprised of five chapters. Chapter One provides the research background of this study. It reviews the major approaches to discourse markers and the role of discourse markers in spoken discourse. It also surveys previous literature that investigates the relevance of discourse markers to second language learning. Chapter Two presents the research questions and hypotheses. It introduces the analytic models, the instruments used for data collection, as well as the procedures taken for data analyses. It also reports briefly the results of the pilot study. It finally outlines the specific phases of the primary study. Chapter Three and Chapter Four present the results of

quantitative and qualitative analyses of the collected data for ideational and pragmatic markers respectively. Chapter Five discusses the findings of the study and concludes by providing some pedagogical implications as well as limitations of the study. All utterances analyzed in this study were directly taken from the original corpus to maintain authenticity.

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CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Within the last several decades, discourse markers have attracted increasing attention from discourse analysts, which resulted in extensive coverage in the literature including articles, overviews and books which represent different theoretical frameworks, approaches and languages. They are intriguing objects of study, as they promise the researcher ready access to the very fabric of talk-in-progress (Redeker, 2006). Discourse markers have been analyzed from a variety of perspectives, the theoretical status of which is the focus of discussion which revolves around their definitions, meanings and functions. On the whole, definitions of what a discourse marker is and what it does vary amongst the researchers: not one single definition of the term discourse marker remains undisputed or unaltered by other researchers for their purposes, despite the wide array of existing labels applied in various discourse functions and on various discourse levels beyond the propositional content (Lenk, 1998a), such as pragmatic markers (Brinton, 1996; Fraser, 1996), pragmatic expressions (Erman, 1987), discourse particles (Schourup, 1985), discourse operators (Redeker, 1991), and discourse markers (Fraser, 1996; Lenk, 1998b; Schiffrin, 1987), sentence connectives (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), utterance particles (Luke, 1990), contextualization cues (Gumpertz, 1982), discourse connectives (Warner, 1985), to name a few. Such multiplicity in terminology implies distinct theoretical approaches and perspectives. It reflects diverse research interests and analytical categories, as well as difficulties in accounting for them adequately in theoretical terms.

The disagreement is not restricted to the term used. Although it is

suggested by some researchers (e.g. Watts, 1988) that it may be possible to ascribe a common grammatical function to discourse markers and to account for them in "an extended model of syntax" (p.242), the general agreement is that discourse markers should be understood as a functional-pragmatic category, but not a formal, morphosyntactic one. Former grammar does not have much to say about the meaning and function of discourse markers, which are considered by most studies as intra-sentential and supra-sentential linguistic units which fulfill a largely non-propositional and connective function at the level of discourse. Discourse markers are signals in the evolving process of the conversation, indicate the relation of an utterance to the preceding context and indicate "an interactive relationship between speaker, hearer, and message" (Fung & Carter, 2007, p.411). They are not semantically and grammatically mandatory and indispensible; their existence does not have an effect on the truth condition of the propositions. In other words, they can be removed from a discourse without "syntactic and semantic consequences" (p.414). But discourse markers are not meaningless decorations. In many cases when there is an absence of discourse markers, the audience would have less clues as to how to interpret the message in relation to the rest of the discourse on the basis of various contextual clues.

This perspective presents a primary obstacle to the formation of a homogeneous conceptualization of DMs. For one thing, there are various suggestions as to what morphological form discourse markers should take. Suggestions range from multi-word lexical phrases such as *to return to my original point* (Fraser 1988, 1990), to *well* and *like* (e.g. Jucker, 1993; Schourup, 2001; Watts 1988), *or* and *but* (Schiffrin, 1987), *oh* and *mhm* (e.g. Jucker & Smith, 1998). *Because, and, then* are included by Schiffrin (1987), but not by Schourup (1985) while *hey* and *aha* are included by Schourup (2001), but not by Schiffrin (1987). Blakemore (1987) who uses the term "discourse connectives" includes elements such as *therefore, so, after all*, and *moreover*. Erman's (1987) "pragmatic expressions" consist of more than one word, e.g. *you know, you see* or *I mean* . These terms obviously do not share the same formal properties. Overall, there are no uniform criteria as to what counts as a "discourse marker", which poses a major challenge in the field.

To make things more complex, the terms proposed are not easily related to

the functions they perform. As noted by Jucker and Smith (1998), different perspectives on discourse markers have the tendency to emphasize one particular function of discourse markers. The functions are as and varied as helping create discourse coherence (Lenk, 1998a; Redeker, 1990; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987), marking a sequential relationship between discourse segments (Fraser, 1999), contributing to the inferential process of the audience (Andersen, 2001; Blakemore, 1995; Jucker, 1993; Rouchota, 1996), pointing to the speaker's epistemic attitude to the utterance and affective attitude to the hearer, among others (Aijmer, 2004). This flexibility and multifunctionality explains their enormous usefulness and frequency in discourse.

Despite the multiplicity of approaches to discourse markers and the diversity of properties and functions attributed to them, here, following Lenk (1998), Stenström (1994) and Jucker and Ziv(1998), among others, for the sake of convenience and simplicity, this overview will use the term "discourse marker" (DM hereafter) as a cover name in its widest definition. There is no prescriptive intention in this terminological choice, because it seems to be the term with the widest currency and least restricted range of application; and in line with this philosophy the various terminological instantiations in different research will also be left unchanged.

This review will first provide some background of DMs by referring to theories based on Schiffrin's model because Schiffrin's work lays the foundation for the booming field of DM research. It will then introduce two major approaches to the function of DM (i.e. the coherence-based approach and the relevance-theoretic account) and Fraser's model which not only integrates both perspectives but also provides a clear definition that helps identify those DMs that function on the ideational level. Then it will discuss the specific role of DMs in spoken interaction. After that, this chapter will briefly describe the relatively theory-independent corpus-based approach which is particularly relevant to examining DMs in spoken context. Lastly, it will relate DMs to spoken language learning.

1.1 Discourse Markers

1.1.1 Schif frin and Redeker

Schiffrin's work (1987) is still one of the most well-known, detailed and comprehensive studies on DMs; it constitutes a strong foundation for comprehending the structure and social handling of language (Ferrara, 1997), and firmly establishes the term of DM in discourse studies. In this account, discourse markers are "linguistic, paralinguistic, or nonverbal elements that signal relations between units of talk by virtue of their syntactic and semantic properties and by virtue of their sequential relations as initial or terminal brackets demarcating discourse units" (Schiffrin, 1987, p.40). Schiffrin's characterization of DMs is solidly based on her perspective of discourse coherence. Discourse is believed to be understood through the structures formed, meanings conveyed and actions performed; "their interdependence must be accounted for when analyzing discourse: discourse structure cannot be analyzed without paying attention to the meaning of, and also to the action performed by an utterance"(p.13). Discourse coherence results from the joint efforts to integrate knowing, saying and doing on the part of the interactants. It is the outcome of "the organization of speaker goals and intentions which are taken up and acted upon by hearers, and from the ways in which language is used in service of such goals" (p.10). Schiffrin believes that these elements are interdependent and must be considered when analyzing discourse.

Schiffrin views conversation as five multilayered interaction. Her model of discourse coherence consists of five different integrated planes of talk, namely, an exchange structure, an action structure, an ideational structure, a participation framework, and an information state. Speakers alternate sequential roles in an exchange structure; their speech acts are situated in an action structure in terms of their speaker identities and social settings as well as interrelatedness of actions; they are related to each other and to their utterances in a participation framework; their knowledge and meta-knowledge about ideas are organized and managed in an information state; linguistic units represent