英语话语标记语的功能和演变研究

Functions and Development of English Discourse Markers

王海霞 著

陕西师範大學出版总社
SHAANXI NORMAL UNIVERSITY GENERAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

2013年教育部留学回国人员科研启动基金项目资助
2014年科研基地-科研协同创新平台-英语学科多元化发展与实践创

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图书代号 ZZ15N0449

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英语话语标记语的功能和演变研究 / 王海霞著. —西安：陕西师范大学出版总社有限公司，2015.8

ISBN 978-7-5613-8187-8

Ⅰ. ①英… Ⅱ. ①王… Ⅲ. ①英语—语用学—研究 Ⅳ. ①H31

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2015)第 150391 号

英语话语标记语的功能和演变研究

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责任编辑 曾学民
责任校对 涂亚红
封面设计 风华设计
出版发行 陕西师范大学出版总社
社　　址 西安市长安南路 199 号（邮编 710062）
网　　址 http://www.snupg.com
经　　销 新华书店
印　　制 陕西省富平县万象印务有限公司
开　　本 720mm×1020mm 1/16
印　　张 12.25
字　　数 120 千
版　　次 2015 年 8 月第 1 版
印　　次 2015 年 8 月第 1 次印刷
书　　号 ISBN 978-7-5613-8187-8
定　　价 33.00 元

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Introduction

A group of "seemingly empty" (Brinton 1996:29) expressions such as *ah/oh*, *actually*, *like*, *now*, *so*, *well*, (a) *kind of/sort* of, *I mean*, *you know*, *the thing is*, etc. frequently occur in communication. The term "discourse marker" is perhaps one of the most commonly used names for such items, and there are also a variety of other names, including "discourse connectives", "discourse cues", "discourse operators", "discourse particles", "pragmatic connectives", "pragmatic markers", "pragmatic particles", "utterance particles", etc.

"Discourse marker" is chosen as a suitable and convenient cover term for the items under discussion in this research, since it seems to "have the widest currency and the least restricted range of application". With this term, we can include a broad variety of elements "under a single conceptual umbrella". It indicates that the items function on the level of discourse rather than individual clause. Moreover, "there is no prescriptive intention in this terminological choice" (Juker & Ziv 1998:2). Discourse marker in this research is employed to describe a class of recurrent and formulaic linguistic items that are syntactically optional, generally have little propositional meaning but are multifunctional, operating on textual and (or) interpersonal level in conversation.

Although the expressions referred to as discourse markers contribute little to the propositional content of the discourse, if they are absent or used wrongly, hearers may find the utterance unnatural or impolite, or have difficulty in establishing a coherent interpretation of the discourse, which is likely to cause communication breakdown (esp.

for non-native speakers). It is noticed that, however, the description of the meanings and functions of such items "given in dictionary entries and in grammar books is often inadequate and insufficient" (Lenk 1998:3).

Fortunately, the interest in their significant role in communication has led to an increase in articles and monographs in this field in the last several decades. A large number of studies have provided detailed description and analysis of discourse markers both as a group and as individual items within different frameworks, "reflecting divergent research interests, methods and goals" (Schourup 1999:228). The fruitful theoretical approaches adopted in the previous studies, to name some of them, are pragmatic perspective (e. g. Brown & Levinson 1987; Fraser 1980; House & Kasper 1981; Holmes 1988), relevance theoretic approach (e. g. Blakemore 1987a, 1987b, 1992, 2002; Jucker 1991, 1993), coherence-based functional approach (e. g. Schiffrin 1987; Redeker 1991), etc. More recently, some studies are conducted with a bottom-up approach, which does not adhere to any one technique of analysis in describing the functions of discourse markers (e. g. Aijmer 2002). In addition to the synchronic studies of discourse markers, there are also diachronic analyses focusing on the syntactic and semantic-pragmatic changes of the items concerned on the basis of historical evidence (e. g. Traugott 1995a, 1999, 2002; Brinton 1996, 2008). It is widely acknowledged that grammaticalization is responsible for the development of discourse markers.

It is found that a top-down approach such as pragmatic perspective or relevance theoretic approach fails to give a comprehensive characterization of the multifunctionality of discourse markers. Moreover, it is important to note that there exists non-discourse-marker use as well as discourse marker use when a particular item is examined, but the former has not received much attention in the context of the research literature on discourse markers. This study argues that we may draw a clearer picture of the item as a discourse marker by differentiating its different uses. We need a way not only to differentiate but also to relate the different uses of the individual items.

The present study is empirical and adopts a bottom-up approach. It is devoted to a

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comprehensive linguistic description of four discourse markers, namely, *actually*, (*a*) *kind of*, *the thing* is and *you know what*, which have evolved into discourse markers from various origins via different paths of development. In respect to each item in this research, attention will be focused on making a distinction between its marker and non-marker uses, exploring its possible path of development (syntactic and semantic-pragmatic changes involved) as well as identifying its various discourse marker functions in interaction. This study supports the idea that grammaticalization accounts for the evolution of such items from propositional or referential expressions to discourse markers. A comprehensive description of the items concerned will add our knowledge of discourse markers and it may have practical applications in English language teaching and lexicography. This research proposes reformulations of some related dictionary entries on the basis of the analyses and description of the selected markers for the purpose of learners of English.

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Chapter 1
The Present State of Research on Discourse Markers

1.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the scholarly literature on discourse markers and presents an overview of the current study. A review of the previous studies shows that despite the quantity of research on discourse markers both as a group and as individual items, it is far from easy to reach an agreement on such fundamental issues as terminology, definition and inventory of members (Brinton 1996; Juker & Ziv 1998; Schourup 1999), which reflects both the distinct theoretical perspectives adopted in different research, and the multiplicity of discourse marker functions (Juker & Ziv 1998). On the basis of examining the theoretical approaches and functional domains in the previous studies, this chapter explains the approach adopted in this research, and introduces the source materials, the outline and the significance of the current study.

1.2 Discourse Markers in Previous Studies

1.2.1 Diversity in Terminology and Definition

As mentioned earlier, there is little agreement among scholars about terminology, definition and inventory of members in the studies of discourse markers. The previous research has been conducted under a variety of labels, and some of them are illustrated in Table 1①.

① There are also some other terms used in previous studies, such as "compromiser" (James 1983), "verbal filler" (Brown 1977), "fumble" (Edmondson 1981), "gambit" (Edmondson 1981), "hedge" (Brown & Levinson 1987), "softener" (Crystal & Davy 1975), etc., which denote specific functions of some items only.

Table 1 Terms in major previous studies

Term	Author
Comment clauses	Quirk et al. 1985; Stenström 1995; Brinton 2008
Conjuncts	Quirk et al. 1985
Cue phrases	Knott and Dale 1994
Discourse connectives	Blakemore 1987a, 1987b,1992, 2002
Discourse cues	Oberlander and Moore 2001
Discourse deictics	Schiffrin 1987, 1990
Discourse markers	Schiffrin 1987; Aijmer 1996; Juker and Ziv 1998; Lenk 1998; Biber et al. 1999
Discourse modifiers	Taglicht 2001
Discourse operators	Redeker 1990, 1991
Discourse particles	Schourup 1985; Aijmer 2002
Discourse signaling devices	Polanyi and Scha 1983
Discourse signals	Stenström 1989
Phatic connectives	Bazanella 1990
Pragmatic connectives	van Dijk 1979; Stubbs 1983
Pragmatic expressions	Erman 1987
Pragmatic formatives	Fraser 1987
Pragmatic markers	Fraser 1988, 1990, 1996; Brinton 1996; Aijmer 2007
Pragmatic operators	Ariel 1994
Pragmatic particles	Östman 1981, 1995, 2005
Semantic constraints on relevance	Blakemore 1988
Sentence connectives	Halliday and Hasan 1976
Utterance particles	Luke 1990

The diversity and complexity in terminology and definition can be seen from the following aspects.

First, it is found that the labels are not used consistently for some scholars in previ-

ous research. To exemplify, discourse marker, discourse particle, and pragmatic marker are used respectively in Aijmer's different works (1996, 2002, 2007) to refer to such items as *oh*, *right*, *now*, *well*, *I mean*, *the fact* is, etc.

Second, different labels used by different scholars may refer to similar categories of items. Conjuncts (Quirk et al. 1985), discourse connectives (Blakemore 1987), discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987), discourse operators (Redeker 1990), sentence connectives (Halliday & Hasan 1976), etc., for instance, can be used to include sets of elements which serve the function of relating the utterances it introduces to the prior discourse segment, such as *and*, *because*, *but*, *so*, etc.

Moreover, the same label may be used with different definitions, referring to different sets of items in different work. Take the term discourse marker for example. For some scholars, discourse markers are primarily used as devices with textual functions. In Schriffrin (1987:31), for instance, discourse markers are defined as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk". Similarly, discourse markers in Fraser (1988:21 ~ 22) are referred to as items which "signal a comment specifying the type of sequential discourse relationship that holds between the current utterance ... and the prior discourse"①. Others see the primary function of discourse markers as both textual and interpersonal. As defined in Biber et al. (1999:1086), discourse markers are inserts which tend "to combine two roles:(a) to signal a transition in the evolving progress of the conversation, and (b) to signal an interactive relationship between speaker, hearer, and message".

It is obvious that the disagreement on definition can be said to result from different views on which of the several discourse functions of the markers "is seen as primary" (Brinton 1996:30)②. Not surprisingly, the divergence in definition has led to a lot of

---

① Discourse marker is a subcategory of pragmatic marker in Fraser (1996).

② Brinton (1996:30) has a summary of different types of definitions of discourse markers, which is based on the different views on the central function of discourse markers. Generally speaking, discourse markers may be seen a means to express the relation of an utterance to the preceding discourse segment or context, to contribute to the structure of discourse, to express response, to achieve conversational continuity, or be considered primarily interpersonal.

disagreement as to which items can be included in the category of discourse marker in present-day English. It is noted that there is still no generally accepted list of discourse markers in English (Jucker 1993:436). Few of the items from Fraser's (1988:26~27, 1990:388, 392) core list, for instance, can be said to be in common with those from Biber et al.'s (1999).

It is argued that the diversity in the aspects discussed above in previous research "reflects both the wide range of linguistic approaches that have been employed for their study, and the multiplicity of functions which these elements are said to fulfill" (Juker & Ziv 1998:1), which will be discussed in the following sections.

1.2.2 Theoretical Approaches

Generally speaking, the analyses of discourse markers in previous studies fall into two types: research with a theoretical basis or without adhering to any one technique of analysis. While the former, a top-down approach as in relevance theory focuses on the role of discourse markers to facilitate the processing and interpretation of the text, the latter, a bottom up approach gives a comprehensive characterization of discourse markers.

In addition to the synchronic studies of discourse markers, there are also diachronic analyses on the basis of historical evidence, which focus on the source and development of individual items (e.g. Traugott 1995a, 1999, 2002; Brinton 1996, 2008).

1.2.2.1 Pragmatic Perspective

"It is widely accepted that utterances are actions performed by agents to change their partners' beliefs and intentions. However, illocutionary acts must also satisfy social goals, related with politeness" (Ardissono et al. 1999).

Some of the early research on discourse markers was conducted as an attempt to describe them as modifiers of speech acts, focusing on the illocutionary significance (e.g. Brown & Levinson1987; Fraser 1980; House & Kasper 1981; Holmes 1988).

Sets of items such as *actually*, *kind of/sort of*, *like*, *well*, *I mean*, *you know*, *you see*, *mind you*, etc., for instance, were referred to as "hedges", which are seen as "an extremely important resource for the realization of politeness strategies" within face-

threatening acts (Brown & Levinson 1987:271)①. To exemplify, *sort of* in the following examples taken from Brown and Levinson (1987:272) "serves notice of reluctance to impinge, or, in other cases indicates a cooperative avoidance of possible disagreement".

(1) I sort of feel I must tell you this.

(2) I sort of hate to say this, but ...

I think, for another example, can be used as a strategy redressing an action threatening the hearer's negative face such as criticism or advice (Brown & Levinson 1987: 164).

It is observed that the studies of discourse markers carried out from pragmatic perspective (such as speech acts theory and politeness theory) focus on their role of establishing and maintaining "interpersonal relations between interlocutors" (James 1983: 193), and other reasons for using discourse markers, such as achieving discourse coherence and facilitating the hearer's interpretation, are ignored. In fact, "little attention was paid to the utterance in its sequential context" (Aijmer 2002:8) in the analyses from pragmatic perspective.

1.2.2.2 Relevance Theoretic Approach

Sperber and Wilson's (1986) relevance theory is one of the influential theories, which provides a useful framework for analyzing discourse markers. Relevance theory builds on Grice's (1975) ideas and reduces the four conversational maxims to the only applicable one, i.e. be relevant②. The core of the theory is the "communicative principle

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① Brown and Levinson (1987:61) define "face" as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself", which is divided into two separate but related aspects, namely, positive face and negative face. While the former "concerns the desire to be appreciated and approved of by selected others", the latter "concerns a person's want to be unimpeded and free from imposition" (Tracy 1990:210). When an act (primarily verbal) "runs contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker", it is called a "face-threatening act" (Brown & Levinson 1987:65).

② According to Sperber and Wilson (1986), the other three maxims, namely, the maxims of quality, quantity and manner, can be violated without necessarily leading to an immediate communication breakdown in an appropriate conversational context, but the same cannot be said of the maxim of relevance.

of relevance", which states that any utterance addressed to someone automatically conveys "the presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Sperber & Wilson 1986:158).

Within relevance theory, discourse markers, or "discourse connectives" (Blakemore 1987a, 1987b, 1992, 2002), are seen as "expressions that constrain the interpretation of the utterances that contain them by virtue of the inferential connections they express" (Blakemore 1987a:105).

It is argued that discourse markers such as *so*, *after all*, *therefore*, *you see*, etc. do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterances that contain them; instead, they impose purely non-propositional or procedural constraints on relevance and minimize the hearer's processing effort by limiting the context, which consists of linguistic context and the assumed background assumption (old information) of the hearer, in the process of interpreting the new information (Blakemore 1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1992). Briefly speaking, discourse markers "constrain the relevance of the proposition they introduce by indicating that it stands in a particular relation to the one most recently processed" (Blakemore 1987b:247).

You see, for instance, in the following example taken from Blakemore (1987a: 88), indicates that the proposition it introduces is an explanation for the information conveyed in the preceding utterance, given the assumption that the propositions are relevant within the context, or to be more specific, there is connection between the road being slippery and slipping.

(1) She slipped. You see, the road was slippery. (Blakemore 1987a:88)

Likewise, *well* "signals that the context created by an utterance may not be the most relevant one for the interpretation of the next utterance" and the hearer has to "reconstruct the background against which he can process the upcoming utterance" (Jucker 1993:450)①.

① It is claimed that the analysis of the individual cases of well "does not differ radically" from the analysis given by the previous researchers who adapted different approaches, but "the relevance-theoretical account offers a greater degree of generalization across a large number of—seemingly—disparate uses of *well*, and it does this on the basis of a more general theory of human communication" (Jucker 1991:440).

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