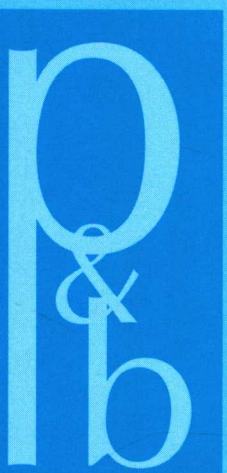
# Metalanguage in Interaction

## Hebrew discourse markers

Yael Maschler



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# Metalanguage in Interaction

# *Pragmatics & Beyond New Series (P&BNS)*

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**Volume 181**

Metalanguage in Interaction. Hebrew discourse markers
by Yael Maschler

*In memory of my deeply beloved sister*
*Dorit Bahir Maschler*
*Jerusalem 8.5.1972 – Singapore 30.8.2000*

# Transcription conventions

Each line denotes an intonation unit (Chafe 1994).

For Hebrew texts, each line is followed by an English gloss. Where this gloss is not close enough to an English utterance, it is followed by a third line supplying a usually literal (but sometimes functional) translation.

Transcription basically follows Chafe 1994, with a few additions:
... – half second pause (each extra dot = another 1/2 second)
.. – perceptible pause of less than half a second
(3.22) – measured pause of 3.22 seconds
ˊ – primary stress
ˋ – secondary stress
ˊˊ – particularly marked primary stress
, – comma at end of line – continuing intonation ('more to come')
. – period at end of line – sentence final falling intonation
? – question mark at end of line – sentence final rising intonation, 'appeal intonation' (Du Bois et al. 1992).
! – exclamation mark at end of line – sentence final exclamatory intonation
ø – lack of punctuation at end of line – a fragmentary intonation unit, one which never reached completion.
-- two hyphens – elongation of preceding vowel sound
[ square bracket to the left of two consecutive lines indicates overlapping speech, two speakers talking at once
alignment such that the right of the top line is placed over the left of the bottom line indicates latching, no interturn pause
/??????/ – transcription impossible
/words within slashes/ indicate uncertain transcription
*p* – piano (spoken softly)
*pp* – pianissimo (spoken very softly)
*mp* – mezzo-piano (spoken fairly softly)
*f* – forte (spoken loudly)
*ff* – fortissimo (spoken very loudly)
*mf* – mezzo-forte (spoken fairly loudly)

*acc.* – accelerando (speeding up)
*ritard.* – ritardando (slowing down)
*cresc.* – crescendo (progressively louder in volume)
*decresc.* – decrescendo (progressively softer in volume)
{in curly brackets} – transcriber's comments concerning paralinguistics and prosody which do not have an agreed upon symbol in this transcription system.
[xxxxx] – material within square brackets *in the gloss* indicates exuberances of translation (what is not there in the original (Ortega y Gasset 1959, Becker 1982)).
' – uninverted quotation mark in the middle of a transliterated word indicates the glottal stop phoneme.
' – inverted quotation mark in the middle of a transliterated word indicates an elided form (e.g., ts'xa instead of tsrixa ('needs', fem. sg.)).

Utterances under consideration are given in **boldface**.

# Preface

I remember making a point to myself as an eight-year-old coming to live in the U.S. for a year: whenever you need some time to think in the midst of conversation, don't say *'e--m*, as they do in Israel; rather, say *u--h* or *uhm*. This will make you sound more like the other kids in class.

Many years later, as an undergraduate student of classical Indo-European philology, certain words, such as Greek *gar*, *men*, *de*; Latin *enim*, *autem*, *nam*; Sanskrit *tadaa*, *tathaa*; or Old English *þaa*, *hwaet* caught my attention in the various languages I was studying. They often appeared at key locations in the text, such as at beginnings of stories or paragraphs. Each such word had several translations, usually into high-register Hebrew words. And perhaps most interestingly, my professors were a bit lost whenever I inquired about the relationships among the different translations of a single such word and about its 'exact meaning'. This is mirrored by what Longacre has written about what he termed 'mystery particles': the "sentential particles continue to defy analysis even at a relatively advanced stage of the research" (1976: 468).

Later, as a graduate student working on a dissertation on Hebrew-English bilingual discourse, this type of word and the 'hesitation utterances' from my childhood turned out to have a very interesting property in common. In the Hebrew-English bilingual corpus I was studying, about 2 out of every 3 such utterances involved the bilingual discourse strategy of language alternation (what has been termed 'code-switching', a language metaphor I would like to avoid here) (Wittgenstein 1958, Reddy 1979, Maschler 1988, 1991). Just as my Hebrew-English bilingual informants often alternated from English to Hebrew when about to verbalize such words as *look, yeah, but, on the other hand, anyway,* or *first of all*, so they often switched to Hebrew when they were about to hesitate with an *uh* or an *uhm*. It turned out that this pattern of language alternation showed up again and again in other language contact situations (e.g., Brody 1987, Salmons 1990, Matras 1998, and the collection of articles in Maschler 2000a).

The more linguistics I studied, the more phenomena seemed to be encapsulated by these mystery particles. I decided to go back to my first language, Hebrew, and investigate in depth these words, which by now had a name – 'discourse markers' (Schiffrin 1987).

Research in the field of discourse markers has flourished in the past two decades. The goal of the present study is to investigate in depth these elements in Hebrew discourse, both as individual utterances and as a system. I focus on how such utterances may come about, on their functions in conversation, on what processes of grammaticization (Hopper 1987, 1988) they may undergo, and on what we can learn from them about Israeli culture and society.

Katriel has written several rich ethnographies of communication in Israeli culture (e.g., 1986, 1991, 1999, 2004). Her research focuses on key words in the contemporary Hebrew lexicon as a window onto Israeli culture. Through a close exploration of the life of certain content-words in Israeli culture (e.g., *dugri*, *lefargen*, *gibush*, *kiturim*), she illuminates the essence of being Israeli. In this book, I am interested in exploring the essence of *interacting* as an Israeli. Rather than focus on content-words, then, I focus on function-words – the grammatical category of discourse markers – which are employed for frame shifting in Hebrew talk-in-interaction, as will be shown. I study the system of discourse markers punctuating spoken discourse because I view these markers as the backbone of interaction. The study thus provides a bridge between the two disciplines of linguistics and communication.

The opening chapter of this book explores Hebrew discourse markers as a system. Through this exploration, my own approach to discourse markers is unraveled and compared to some previous approaches. In the chapters that follow, I focus on several particular markers, illuminating through them certain quintessential aspects of Israeli society, identity, and culture. The final chapter ties together the patterns gleaned from the studies of the individual markers and delineates my approach to the grammaticization of discourse markers.

I do not, of course, claim this to be a comprehensive study of all the discourse markers of Hebrew – a task far too ambitious for the current project. Rather, it is intended as an exploration into a variety of such markers, in the quest for unraveling the essence of interacting as an Israeli.

This study is informed by a variety of approaches to the study of discourse: studies of intonation and spoken discourse (e.g., Chafe 1987, 1994, Du Bois et al. 1992), work in the discourse functional tradition (e.g., Hopper 1979, Chafe 1980, Becker 1984, Thompson 1984, Du Bois 1985), the methods and findings of conversation analysis (CA) (e.g., Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, Jefferson 1993, Sacks 1992, Schegloff 1993, 1996a,b), and studies in linguistic anthropology (e.g., Becker 1979, Goffman 1981, Gumperz 1982, Katriel 1986, 1991, 1999, 2004, Tannen 1984, 1989). It contributes to a cross-language perspective on the grammaticization of discourse markers (cf. Auer 1996, Traugott and Dasher 2002, Fleischman and Yaguello 2004) and asks "how linguistic structures [discourse markers] and patterns of use are shaped by, and themselves shape, interaction" (Selting and Couper-Kuhlen 2001: 1). This book, then, is about Hebrew interactional linguistics.

# Acknowledgments

*Metalanguage in Interaction: Hebrew discourse markers* was inspired by the work of many linguists to whom I feel deeply indebted. It was my great privilege to study under the mentorship of Alton L. Becker. Although this took place over two decades ago, his humanistic linguistics, inseparable from his character and personality, sparkles brightly in my mind. Wallace Chafe taught me how to approach spoken discourse and think about cognitive constraints. From Paul Hopper I learned about grammaticization and emergent grammar, and also how to read Wittgenstein. I have also learned much from John Du Bois, Emanuel Schegloff, Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, Sandra Thompson, and Elizabeth Traugott, all of whom I had the good fortune to study with at one or another of the Linguistic Society of America summer institutes in 1985, 1987, and 2001.

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I dedicate this book to the memory of my deeply beloved sister Dorit, whose sudden untimely death will always darkly color our lives in many more ways than we would have ever imagined.

My own family deserves the greatest acknowledgment. My children, Shira, Maya, and Yotam, have not only provided a wealth of excerpts for analysis (some of which have found their way into the pages of this book); they continue to be my partners in unearthing Israeli ways of talking and being in the world, while constituting a source of great joy, pride, and meaning in life. Lastly, and most importantly, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my husband and partner Paul Woodward Inbar for listening to me talk about this book endlessly, for his sharp linguistic insights, criticism and advice, for his sound editing, generosity, and care, and most importantly, for his love and friendship.

# Table of contents

**Transcription conventions** xi
**Preface** xiii
**Acknowledgments** xv

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION
**Metalanguage in interaction: Discourse markers as a system** 1
1. Metalanguaging 1
2. Language alternation at discourse markers 2
   2.1 Relation to previous approaches to discourse markers 7
3. The data 9
4. Distributional patterning: Negotiating frame shifts via discourse markers 10
5. Defining discourse markers 16
   5.1 Previous approaches to prosody in defining discourse markers 20
6. Functional patterning of discourse markers 21
   6.1 Previous approaches to realms of operation of discourse markers 26
7. Structural patterning of discourse markers 27
8. Grammaticization of discourse markers 33
   8.1 Traugott's theory of grammaticization and semantic change 37
9. Interacting as an Israeli 39

CHAPTER 2. THE INTERPERSONAL REALM
**The discourse marker *nu*: Israeli Hebrew impatience in interaction** 41
1. Introduction 41
2. Data 45
3. Hastening co-participant to get on with some non-verbal action 46
4. *Nu* urging further development within a topic 52
   4.1 Narrational discourse 52
      4.1.1 Urging a move on to the next episode of a narrative 52
   4.2 Urging further development within a non-narrational topic 55
   4.3 *Nu* as a continuer 59

4.4 Summary of the 'urging further development of topic' function 64
5. Granting permission to perform an action 64
6. Summary of sequential functions of *nu* 68
7. Keying functions of *nu*: joking/provoking 69
7.1 From joking to provoking 69
7.2 *Nu* in combination with other discourse markers 71
7.2.1 *Nu* in combination with *'az ma*? ('so what?') 72
8. Grammaticization of *nu* 74

CHAPTER 3. THE TEXTUAL REALM
**The discourse marker *bekitsur*: Retroactively constructing digressions** 79
1. Introduction 79
2. Data 84
3. Summarizing *bekitsur* 85
3.1 Summary following a list 85
3.2 Summary of episode 87
3.3 Drawing conclusions from episode 91
4. Resumptive *bekitsur*: Returning to the main topic 95
4.1 Collaboration in returning to the main topic 96
4.2 Returning from interaction-based digressions 103
4.3 Returning from content-based digressions 104
4.3.1 Following listener-initiated digressions 104
4.3.2 Following storyteller-initiated digressions 106
4.3.2.1 Following a story aside 106
4.3.2.2 Following orientation 108
4.3.2.3 Following evaluation 110
4.3.2.4 Organizing the hierarchy of episodes in a story 112
4.4 Returning from insertion sequences 114
5. Foregrounding *bekitsur*: Introducing a new narrative 116
6. Grammaticization of *bekitsur* 119
7. Interacting as an Israeli via *bekitsur* 124

CHAPTER 4. THE COGNITIVE REALM
**The discourse marker *ke'ilu*: Realizing the need to rephrase** 127
1. Introduction 127
2. Data and methodology 132
3. A quantitative perspective on the different functions of *ke'ilu* 133
4. Functional distribution of *ke'ilu*: A qualitative perspective 134
4.1 *Ke'ilu* as a conjunction in the literal sense 134

4.2 *Ke'ilu* as hedge 137
4.2.1 Post-positioned *ke'ilu* as hedge 137
4.2.2 Pre-positioned *ke'ilu* as hedge 138
4.2.3 Interpersonal constraints on hedging *ke'ilu* 140
4.3 *Ke'ilu* as focus marker 143
4.3.1 Pre-positioned *ke'ilu* as focus marker 145
4.3.2 Post-positioned *ke'ilu* as focus marker 147
4.3.3 Post-positioned focus-marking *ke'ilu* in aposiopesis 148
4.3.4 Interpersonal constraints on focus-marking *ke'ilu* 150
4.4 *Ke'ilu* as discourse marker of self-rephrasal 152
4.4.1 *Ke'ilu* in self-rephrasals of clarification sequences 154
4.4.2 Self-rephrasal *ke'ilu* tokens as fillers 157
4.5 *Ke'ilu* in quotations 158
4.5.1 *Ke'ilu* in double-voiced ironic quotations 160
5. The functional itinerary of *ke'ilu* 162
6. Grammaticization of *ke'ilu* in cross-linguistic perspective 165
7. Interacting as an Israeli via *ke'ilu* 166

CHAPTER 5. BETWEEN REALMS
**The discourse marker *tov*: Accepting while shifting** 171
1. Introduction 171
2. Data 176
3. Interpersonal *tov* 176
3.1 Acceptance of some state of things 177
3.2 Third turn receipt 180
3.3 Concession 181
3.4 Ironic agreement: Disagreement 185
4. Textual *tov*: Marking expected transition 188
4.1 Transitional *tov* into the beginning of a narrative 188
4.2 Transitional *tov* between the episodes of narrative discourse 189
4.3 Transitional *tov* returning to an interrupted action 190
4.4 Transitional *tov* ending a topic/action 191
5. Ambiguous cases: Between interpersonal and textual *tov* 193
5.1 Third turn receipt + ending an action 193
5.2 Third turn receipt + transition into following episode/action 195
5.3 Acceptance of some state of things + transition into following episode/action 196
5.4 Concession + transition into following episode/action 198
5.5 Concession and return to main topic 200
6. Grammaticization of *tov* 201

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS
**Grammaticization from interaction** 207
1. The system of discourse markers permeating interaction 207
   1.1 Function 207
   1.2 Metalaguaging at frame shifts 209
   1.3 Structure 210
2. Grammaticization of discourse markers 214
   2.1 Grammaticization of *nu*, *bekitsur*, *ke'ilu*, and *tov* 214
   2.2 Common threads and differences among the grammaticization patterns studied 220
   2.3 Projectability and grammaticization of constructions 225
3. Interacting as an Israeli 229

**Bibliography** 233

**Author index** 251

**Subject index** 253

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

## Metalanguage in interaction: Discourse markers as a system

### 1. Metalanguaging

I begin by elaborating on what is unique to my own approach to discourse markers. There have been many studies of discourse markers over the past two decades, most notably, Schiffrin 1987 (for overviews, see Brinton 1996, Jucker and Ziv 1998, Schourup 1999, Maschler 2000a, Schiffrin 2001, Fischer 2006, Maschler 2008). While there exist a few article-length studies of Hebrew discourse markers (e.g., Ariel 1998, Even-Zohar 1982, Henkin 1999, Livnat and Yatziv 2003, 2006, Shloush 1998, Ziv 1998, 2001), my own are exceptional in being based on naturally occurring conversation (Maschler 1997a, 1998b, 2001, 2002 a,b, 2003, 2009). However, the most unique aspect of the present approach is that it focuses on the process of **metalanguaging** in relation to employment of discourse markers.

With the term 'metalanguaging', I wish to evoke a term coined by A. L. Becker, 'languaging'. Becker moved from a notion of 'language' to a notion of 'languaging' in order to shift from an idea of language as something accomplished to the idea of languaging as an ongoing process (1988: 25). A similar shift is found in Hopper's ideas about emergent grammar (1987, 1988, see below), which he contrasts with *a priori* grammar.

Languaging is possible at two levels of discourse. Generally when we use language, we look through it at a world we believe to exist beyond language. However, we can also use language in order to look through it at the process of using language itself (Maschler 1994b). I investigate here this latter process of **meta**languaging – using language in order to communicate about the process of using language. Metalanguaging, I argue, is the semantic-pragmatic process which is at the heart of both the employment and grammaticization (Hopper 1987) of discourse markers.

Discourse markers are viewed here as linguistic elements employed for metalanguaging – languaging about the interaction, as opposed to languaging about the extralingual world. In other words, rather than referring to the world perceived by speakers (through language) to exist **beyond** language, discourse markers refer to the text itself, to the interaction among its speakers, or to the cognitive processes taking place in their minds during verbalization.