Pragmatic Markers in English

Grammaticalization
and Discourse Functions

Laurel J. Brinton

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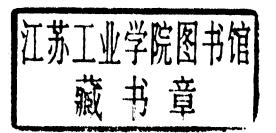
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Preface

This topic of this work originated, quite unexpectedly, in a small study of translations of *Beowulf* I undertook some years ago, which I joking entitled "*What ho, lo, yes, indeed!* Finding a translation of *Beowulf* for the Freshman". While I was generally concerned with other matters in that paper, I also noticed the difficulty that the first word of the poem (*hwæt*) caused for translators. The work of Deborah Schiffrin (*Discourse Markers*, 1987) and other scholars within the field of discourse analysis suggested a possible approach to such "mystery particles", as Robert Longacre has termed them, and a couple of years later I returned to the topic. I first began by examining Old English *hwæt* and Middle English *gan* from the perspective of discourse analysis. Both of these forms had traditionally been seen as empty forms, pleonasms, or metrical fillers. I took the position that it would be more revealing to examine not whether these forms occurred in verse or in prose—which had been the usual approach—but how the forms were distributed in respect to the structure of a text and the discourse contexts in which they occurred. Such a perspective convinced me to see *hwæt* as an attention-getter and marker of common knowledge, functions remarkably similar to Modern English *you know*. In determining the function of *gan*, I was led to consider questions of narrative structure and foregrounding. After *hwæt* and *gan*, I went on to study a variety of seemingly empty forms in Old English and Middle English which might better be understood as serving pragmatic roles. I should point out that my study is intended only as a sampling of such forms, many more of which could undoubtedly be identified in both stages of the language. As my work continued, my approach was refined and expanded, as more questions of textual structure and interpersonal interaction seemed to arise. It might have proved useful to review *hwæt* and *gan* in light of these additional questions, but time permitted only a partial reexamination.

From my studies of individual forms in Old and Middle English and from a study of the scholarship on discourse markers in Modern English, I came to the conclusion that discourse markers—what I call in this study *pragmatic markers*—can be defined, despite the variety of forms included and the multitude of functions proposed, by two main functions, which fall into the categories that Michael Halliday has termed "textual" and "interpersonal". In looking at pragmatic markers in earlier stages of the language, I was also

concerned with their diachronic development, which seemed to be accounted for by a broadly defined process of grammaticalization. I wanted to account for how textual and interpersonal meanings arise from propositional meanings and how all the types of meanings are interrelated. Additionally, I wished to determine whether pragmatic markers exhibit any of the morphosyntactic changes characteristic of grammaticalization. The following study is thus an examination not only of the functions of various pragmatic markers in earlier stages of the language but also of the evolution of these functions over time; it also, I hopes, contributes to the ongoing discussion about the nature and function of pragmatic markers.

Contents

List of abbreviations

ÆCH II	*Ælfric's Catholic homilies: The second series* (Godden, ed.)
ÆLS	*Ælfric's Lives of saints* (Skeat, ed.)
AHD	*American heritage dictionary of the English language*
ASPR	*The Anglo-Saxon poetic records* (Krapp—Dobbie, eds.)
Bede	*The Old English version of Bede's Ecclesiastical history of the English people* (Miller, ed.)
BT	*An Anglo-Saxon dictionary* (Bosworth—Toller, eds.)
BTS	*An Anglo-Saxon dictionary: Supplement* (Toller—Campbell, eds.)
Chaucer	*The Riverside Chaucer* (Benson, ed.)
CT	*The Canterbury tales*
A.Kn.	"The Knight's tale"
A.Mil.	"The Miller's tale"
A.Prol.	"The general prologue"
A.Rv.	"The Reeve's tale"
B.Mel.	"The tale of Melibee"
B.Mk.	"The Monk's tale"
B.ML	"The Man of Law's tale"
B.NP	"The Nun's Priest's tale"
B.Pri.	"The Prioress's tale"
B.Sh.	"The Shipman's tale"
B.Th.	"The tale of Sir Thopas"
C.Pard.	"The Pardoner's tale"
C.Phs.	"The Physician's tale"
D.Fri.	"The Friar's tale"
D.Sum.	"The Summoner's tale"
D.WB	"The Wife of Bath's tale"
E.Cl.	"The Clerk's tale"
E.Mch.	"The Merchant's tale"
F.Fkl.	"The Franklin's tale"
F.Sq.	"The Squire's tale"
G.CY	"The Canon Yeoman's tale"
G.SN	"The Second Nun's tale"
H.Mcp.	"The Manciple's tale"
I.Pars.	"The Parson's tale"

EModE	Early Modern English
HCET	*Helsinki corpus of English texts: Diachronic and dialectal* (Kytö 1993)
Malory	*The works of Sir Thomas Malory* (Vinaver, ed.)
ME	Middle English
MED	*Middle English dictionary*
ModE	Modern English
OE	Old English
OED	*Oxford English dictionary*
Shakespeare	*William Shakespeare: The complete works* (Wells et al., eds.)
TC	*Troilus and Criseyde*
Webster's	*Webster's dictionary of English usage*

Chapter 1

"Mystery features" of Old and Middle English

1.0. Introduction

Old and Middle English narrative style is often characterized by bewildering and seemingly random shifts between the narrative past and historical present tense, confusing and unclear anaphoric reference, the use of formulaic phrases, repetition, and variation, and a preponderance of *and* connectives, all of which suggest a lack of literary sophistication and a "primitive" paratactic style. Moreover, there are a number of apparently meaningless words and phrases, including adverbs, particles, and interjections—what Longacre (1976) terms "mystery particles"—whose word class, distribution, and meaning are opaque. The appearance of these features often seems to be grammatically optional and semantically or functionally unmotivated.

The description of these "mystery particles" and other aspects of Old English and Middle English style, which collectively could be called "mystery features", as "merely a piece of linguistic apparatus" (Clemoes 1985: 27), or, as one scholar metaphorically puts it, "linguistic Cinderellas: familiar, drab, hard-worked, and lacking in morphological, phonological and etymological glamour" (Enkvist 1972: 95) calls to mind language that has been used to describe *discourse markers* in Modern English. These have been termed the "detritus" of conversation, "apparently lacking semantic content, and seemingly not contributing to the substance of what the discourse ends up having said" (Schegloff 1981: 74), or "prefabs which the speaker may utter while planning what he really wants to say" (Brown 1978: 275). They have also been seen figuratively as "the oil which helps us perform the complex task of spontaneous speech production and interaction smoothly and efficiently" (Crystal 1988: 48), the "discourse lubricant" (Edmondson; cited by House—Kasper 1981: 168), the "conversational greaser" (Wong-Fillmore; cited by Holmes 1986: 1), and the "discourse glue" (Fraser 1990: 385), on one hand, and as "traffic marker[s]" (Enkvist 1994:58), on the other hand. But as Bolinger (1977: ix) reminds us, we often do not pay these forms the respect that they deserve, confining them instead to a kind of grammatical or lexical "lunacy ward ... where mindless morphs stare vacantly with no purpose other than to be where they are". In recent years,

discourse grammars have recognized that while the meaning, syntactic distribution, or function of these diverse forms defies analysis on the local clausal level, they can be satisfactorily explained with reference to the global organization of discourse (Stubbs 1983: 67, 82) or to larger aspects of the communicative context. As Longacre argues, mystery features "almost inevitably ... are found to have a function which relates to a unit larger than the sentence, i.e. to the paragraph and the discourse" (1976: 468). They are the "clue words" (Redeker 1990: 379) to the structure of discourse.

1.1. Approaches to mystery features

The assumption of the following work is that the approach of current discourse analysis provides a more fruitful means of analyzing the mystery particles of Old and Middle English texts than do the traditional approaches.

1.1.1. Traditional approaches

Traditionally, only very restricted functions have been attributed to mystery features in older English texts. Most often, they are considered meaningless—as defects of style—the result of artistic clumsiness or crudeness in an earlier age. They are often thought to assist a poet (however competent) in composing metrically sound lines. They may be seen negatively as grammatical pleonasms, such as dummy tense carriers, or positively as signals of the grammatical freedom, flexibility, or lack of regularity of an older stage of the language. Less often, the mystery features are seen as stylistically meaningful, with either an emphatic or purely ornamental function. Finally, mystery features may be recognized as meaningful in the sense that they are evidence of the oral nature of the society in which the texts were composed or of the oral nature of composition or reception.

1.1.1.1. Metrical expedient

The most common explanation for the appearance of many apparently meaningless features, especially in Middle English, is as a metrical expedient: they are claimed to serve as fillers that add a syllable or two to a metrical line or as aids in rhyming that allow the infinitive to move to end position. An example of this type of explanation is Visser's account of the historical present (1964, 1966: 705-726) in which he rejects the suggestion that the historical present in Middle English was a stylistic device to lend vividness to the narrated events: such a notion has "not a leg to stand on" (1964: 136, 1966: 710). Instead, he argues, the historical present, since it occurs almost exclusively in poetry, is merely a poetic expedient, used for the purposes of rhyme or meter when the preterite is either metrically too short or too long or when *-eth* is preferable to *-ede* (1964: 137-140, 1966: 711-717). For this reason, he terms it the "substitute present" (1966: 720). Similar arguments have been made for *gan* 'began' and *do* in Middle English (see section 3.3).

The difficulty with such arguments is that the origin and spread of a linguistic form is attributed solely to the advent of metrical verse. That is, it is implied that if it were not for the rise of metrical verse in Middle English, one could not account for the existence of the historical present or of *gan* or *do*. Furthermore, it is assumed, not always correctly, that a form used as a metrical expedient must necessarily be meaningless.

1.1.1.2. Style marker

Apart from serving as empty decorations, many of the mystery features have also been seen as serving a stylistic function, one usually described as "emphatic" or "intensive". For example, in describing the function of *gan* in Middle English, Homann (1954) has argued that Chaucer uses it to make distinctions of tempo, intensity, and manner, and to indicate dramatic moments, nuances of character, or vivid and exciting contexts. Stylistic accounts for the use of the historical present are also common, as when Mustanoja (1960: 486) asserts that it is used "in vivid description of actions and situations and of deep emotions. It is also used for creating suspense ...." Such suggestions have generally been treated dismissively by other scholars, since stylistic functions are highly subjective and difficult to establish. It is facile to point to many exceptions, where particularly vivid or important passages appear entirely unmarked.

1.1.1.3. Oral feature

It has also been traditional to label these mystery features "colloquialisms" (e.g., Schlauch 1952; Salmon 1975). However, in recent years this concept

has taken on more precise meanings. Work within the oral-formulaic theory argues for both the oral composition and the oral transmission of medieval and earlier verse, including, centrally, Old English verse (see Foley 1985 for a review of the literature); moreover, the oral performance of Old English verse is widely acknowledged (see Opland 1980). This work has used as crucial evidence for orality the existence on the microlevel of the formula. Formulas, as well as repetition and variation, are attributed to the mechanical demands of oral composition, performance, and transmission, such as the lack of planning time and the need for mnemonic devices. While the oral-formulaic theory has been subject to criticism in recent years (see, e.g., Green 1990: 270-272, who suggests that oral performance and oral composition should not be seen as synonymous), it is generally accepted that in the medieval period there was an intense interaction or "symbiosis between orality and writing" (Green 1990: 279). The transition from an oral culture to a literate culture was neither immediate nor simple.[1] European medieval written texts exhibit many structural and linguistic elements characteristic of oral discourse, and one finds what has been termed an "oral residue": "The European Middle Ages were bound to orality further in that their literature exhibited on all sides the heavy residue of primary orality ..." (Ong 1984: 3).

Many of the mystery features can thus be seen as part of this oral residue expected in the period of transition, that is, as features of oral speech retained in written texts. As Fleischman (1990b: 23) claims, "many of the disconcerting properties of medieval vernacular texts—their extraordinary parataxis, mystery particles, conspicuous anaphora and repetitions, 'proleptic' topicalizations, and jarring alternations of tenses, to cite but a few—can find more satisfying explanations if we first of all acknowledge the extent to which our texts structure information the way a spoken language does." Examining the transferring of oral devices into contemporary written texts, Lakoff concludes that "the borrowing of a device from one medium into another is always overdetermined: it carries with it the ... 'feel' of one medium into another (the metacommunicative effect) and at the same time attempts to utilize the language of one mode to communicate ideas in another (the communicative effect)" (1982: 251–252). The "feel" conveyed in the written text is the quality of "involvement" characteristic of the oral medium (Chafe 1982: 46) and also of imaginative literature (Tannen 1982b: 2) and the maximal use of context found in oral texts (Tannen 1982b: 3).

An example of an argument attributing an oral basis to a mystery feature in Old English is Wårvik (1990a; 1990b), who argues that the marking of

foreground in Old English narrative by the use of *þa* 'then' is a remnant of an oral storytelling tradition. In the increasingly literate Middle English culture, *þa* decreases in frequency and loses its prominence (Wårvik in press). ME *þan* 'then' no longer serves as an explicit foregrounder, though it still has a discourse function in marking episodic shifts or turning points (Wårvik 1990b: 569). In Modern English, *then* is merely a sequential marker in written texts; however, it preserves a foregrounding function in oral narratives and in stories told by children (Warvik 1990a: 538, 1990b: 570; see also Bronzwaer 1975: 66-72), where it has an "oral, colloquial, simple, racy, stacatto" feel (Enkvist 1994: 60). Wårvik (1990a: 538-539, 1990b: 571-572) attributes the change in the use of *then* not only to a typological shift in English from an explicit foreground-marking language to a fuzzy background-marking language (1990a: 536, 1990b: 572), but also to the shift from an oral to a literate culture, or from "primary" to "secondary" orality (see also Enkvist 1994: 59); Old English written texts are literate forms produced within an essentially oral culture, while Modern English spoken stories are oral forms produced within an essentially literate culture. Moreoever, while *then* in Modern English is an optional device among several which the storyteller may use, and hence a matter of stylistic variation, *þa* in Old English is a structurally determined one (Wårvik 1987b: 389, 1990a: 538, 1990b: 571; cf. Enkvist 1994: 60), though Enkvist (1994: 59) points out that once an oral device loses its original "mnemotechnic" function, it can be exploited, as *þa* is in Old English, for rhetorical, stylistic, and literary uses.

1.1.2. Discourse analytic approaches

In recent years, linguistic approaches to contemporary discourse, focusing primarily on naturally-occurring conversation and spontaneous narration, have shown that despite its seemingly unformed and incoherent appearance, nonliterary oral discourse is in fact highly organized and coherent, though perhaps not in the same way as written texts. Furthermore, it often contains explicit markers of structure and cohesion. For example, oral narratives tend to be organized in terms of episodes, with episode boundaries formally marked (see section 2.2.2), rather than in terms of the linear plots found in written narratives. Oral discourse is also firmly fixed within the communicative context and is hence interlaced with markers of speaker, hearer, code, and so on. A number of recent studies have argued that the primarily oral

discourse of medieval texts shares some of the pragmatic features of contemporary oral discourse and that the tools of discourse analysis provide a fuller explication of the functions of these oral features than has been provided by traditional explanations.

1.1.2.1. Discourse marker

The mystery features of medieval texts most closely resemble the forms identified as discourse markers in Modern English. These are short words or phrases such as *well, so, oh, you know*, or *I mean* which are of high frequency in oral discourse. They are traditionally known as "fillers" (but will be termed *pragmatic markers* in this work [see section 2.1]) and are often stigmatized or deplored. They are thought to be empty of lexical meaning, and hence difficult to translate, marginal in respect to word class, syntactically quite free, and optional; they appear to be without propositional meaning or grammatical function. However, rather than seeing them as meaningless or merely stylistic, discourse analysts recognize a number of global functions in them, on the textual level:

(a) to mark various kinds of boundaries (to initiate or end a discourse or to effect a shift in topic), and

(b) to assist in turn-taking in oral discourse or "chunking" (marking of episode or paragraph) in written discourse;

and on the interpersonal level:

(a) subjectively, to express speaker attitude, and

(b) interactively, to achieve intimacy between speaker and addressee (for example, by appealing to the addressee or expressing shared or common knowledge).

(See further, section 2.1.4.)

An example of a study of forms in earlier English from a discourse perspective is Calvo's (1992) study of *you* and *thou* in Early Modern English. While these pronominal forms are often used in seemingly random ways, Calvo argues (pp. 22-26) that in addition to the well-recognized expressive and attitudinal meanings of *you* and *thou* and an interpersonal function in negotiating social identities, they may also serve to indicate changes in conversational topic and to mark discourse boundaries. Thus, they possess many of the characteristics of pragmatic markers. Calvo believes that it is not the particular form used, but the shift between forms that serves a discourse function: "The shift from one pronominal form to another seems to have

sometimes been exploited by Shakespeare to differentiate two intertwined conversational topics or to mark the boundary between two distinct sections in a dramatic dialogue" (p. 26).

1.1.2.2. Signal of pragmatic relevance

A recent approach to pragmatic markers rests on the Gricean principle of conversational relevance as developed by Sperber—Wilson (1986). It is argued that a theory of relevance sheds light on a wide range of phenomena on the borderline between semantics and pragmatics. Blakemore (1987a: 78-97, 1988b: 246-249, 1990: 367) argues that pragmatic markers such as *so, after all, therefore, you see, afterwards, as a result, but, however*, and *moreover* do not contribute to the propositional meaning of the utterances that contain them; instead, they minimize the hearer's processing costs by limiting the context, or set of assumptions (old information), used in interpreting the proposition (new information): they "constrain the relevance of the proposition they introduce by indicating that it stands in a particular relation to the one most recently processed" (1987b: 247). That is, pragmatic markers indicate not only that an utterance is relevant, but, by their meanings, they impose constraints on the way it is relevant (Brockway 1981: 64-65). For example, *so* indicates that the proposition it introduces is a contextual implication of the preceding one (Blakemore 1988a), or *well* shifts the relevant context for interpretation, signifying that the immediately preceding context is not the most relevant one (Jucker 1993). This approach to pragmatic markers has not yet been applied to forms in earlier stages of the language, though Sell (1985a: 181) suggests that metatextual comments in Chaucer (e.g., remarks by the narrator concerning the need for cutting a story short or moving on, or warnings about the difficulty of the text), which give "the reader further help in understanding the bearing of one thing on another", follow the Gricean maxims of relation and manner and contribute to the politeness of the discourse.

1.1.3. Approach taken in this study

While the synchronic study of pragmatic markers in Modern English has been actively pursued in recent years, the study of such forms in earlier linguistic periods and of their diachronic development has been largely

ignored. Calvo concludes her article on *you* and *thou* by saying, "Above all, I hope to have attracted attention to the fact that for over twenty years the study of discourse has been almost exclusively concerned with synchronic analysis and that since we can no longer resort to the excuse that discourse studies are young and immature, we might find it necessary very soon to turn our minds to *diachronic* studies of discourse as well" (1992: 26). Fleischman (1990b: 37) makes a similar call, arguing that "New Philology" must bring "the pragmatic concerns of a discourse-based linguistics to bear on the textual artifacts" of medieval language.[2] Richardson (1994c: 10) sees "New Philology" as a means "to understand both the pragmatic functions of discourse devices and the way these devices work together in oral and literary narrative". We might also call this new endeavor "historical discourse analysis" or "historical text linguistics" (Enkvist—Wårvik 1987: 222).

Armed with the methods of discourse analysis I revisit in this study some of the mystery features of Old English and Middle English texts traditionally dismissed as meaningless or merely stylistic to see whether they belong to the domain of discourse. The existence of an oral residue in texts from these periods is assumed (see above, section 1.1.1.3). I investigate whether medieval narrative might be structured much like contemporary oral narrative and whether these linguistic features might be functionally motivated in ways analogous to pragmatic markers in Modern English discourse, that is, textually and interpersonally. However, I recognize that the function of oral features in the written texts of Old and Middle English may be somewhat different from the function of comparable features in the strictly oral discourse of Modern English, perhaps being used self-consciously as stylized pragmatic markers.

This work is therefore concerned with identifying and determining the functions of a variety of different pragmatic markers in Old and Middle English. It will question whether comparable discourse functions and a similar diversity of forms occur in earlier periods as occur today, and whether one can detect a continuity of functions. But more than simply compiling an inventory of these forms, this work will focus on the origin and development of a select set of pragmatic markers from a diachronic perspective, addressing the following questions:

(a) What is the source of pragmatic markers? What syntactic and semantic properties do they have? What is it about the semantics of particular forms that predispose them to express certain discourse notions?

(b) What is the semantic development of pragmatic markers? Is it transparent or opaque? Does it follow recognized principles of semantic change?

Do discourse functions derive in some explicable way from the original propositional meanings of forms?

(c) How do pragmatic markers fare historically? What factors lead to the loss and replacement of pragmatic markers? What accounts for the changes in the inventory of pragmatic markers? Are they as transient or ephemeral as has been suggested (Stein 1985: 300)?

The origin and development of pragmatic markers will be examined as instances of grammaticalization, with reference made to current work on this diachronic process.

1.2. The diachronic study of pragmatic markers

Forms which have been seen to be discoursally motivated in Old, Middle, and Early Modern English range from single words (e.g., *þa* 'then') and phrases (e.g., *y understonde* 'I understand') to syntactic forms (e.g., the historical present) and modes of discourse (e.g., direct speech). Though studies of forms serving as pragmatic markers in the history of English are not numerous, they suggest that a diversity of forms and functions existed in the earlier periods of the language. Discourse roles attributed to these forms include textual functions, such as foregrounding and backgrounding, saliency or peak marking, and narrative segmentation (beginning and ending episodes, changing topic or character, resuming narration after interruptions, shifting narrative mode, and so on) as well as interactive functions, such as attention-getting, focusing on speaker, and appealing to addressee, or evaluative functions.

1.2.1. Single lexical items

Perhaps the greatest amount of research has been carried out on OE *þa*.[3] In an early study, Enkvist begins from the position that *þa* is a pragmatic marker, a "detachable" element whose "removal does not seem to destroy the basic grammatical well-formedness of the sentence" (1972: 95) and one which "does its main job or jobs at text and discourse level" (1986: 301; see also Foster 1975: 406). Enkvist's initial insight is that *þa* is a marker of action, specifically of foregrounded action as opposed to backgrounded material (1972, 1986: 303-307; also Wårvik 1987b: 386). Wårvik (1990a: 535-536, 1990b: 563-564, in press) provides evidence from a theory of grounding (see

below, section 2.3) for the foregrounding function of *þa*: it typically occurs in clauses with individuated human subjects, usually the hero of the story, and with highly affected objects, and in clauses which express dynamic, punctual, unique (not repeated or habitual), purposeful, and completed events presented in "natural" or "iconic" order. Waterhouse (1984) gives further evidence for the foregrounding function of *þa* by recording its predominance in the narrative sections of Ælfric's *Lives of saints*, its absence in direct speech, introductory sections which set the scene, and homiletic passages, except those which contain exempla, and its rarity in descriptive, explanatory, exhortatory, and didactic passages, despite the fact that 45% of the sentences in the entire text begin with *þa*.

In subsequent work, Enkvist begins to recognize the "multifunctional" nature of *þa* on the structural, stylistic, and rhetorical levels. He observes that *þa* may serve as a sequencer of events (1986: 306-307; also Foster 1975: 404) and a marker of colloquial or impromptu speech (also Foster 1975: 406-414). Enkvist also argues that *þa* may become a "foreground 'dramatizer'"; that is, "once *þa* becomes associated with foregrounded action, it can be used to indicate that a storyteller regards something as part of the foregrounded action even if it might be regarded as stative or static in its basic decontextualized sense" (1986: 304). More recently, Wårvik (1995) has noted the "packing" of *þa* in the peak zone of the narrative and its role as a "peak marker".[4]

Enkvist (1986) also identifies a role for *þa* as an indicator of narrative segmentation, a function originally recognized by Foster (1975: 406), who defines it as "the process of apportioning events into syntactic units". Foster sees the function of *þa* as that of heading "discourse units" or "segments", with additional clauses within the segment joined by *and*. Enkvist (1986: 305-307) denotes these *þa ... and* sequences "verb chains" and argues that "each *þa*, with its chain of links such as *and*, initiates a new episode or move in the narrative"; these chains give both internal cohesion and mark external junctures. Recognizing a hierarchy of narrative segmentation with four levels (story, episode, subepisode, and move), Enkvist—Wårvik (1987) find that the *þa ... and* chain normally denotes the level of subepisode or move. Hopper (1979a: 50, 51, 53, 54-55, 1992: 218, 231) similarly argues that in the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* of the Parker Manuscript the "main episode" begins with S(ubject) V(erb) O(bject) syntax, while "minor episodes" begin with *þa* (or a full adverbial phrase) plus VSO syntax, and "interior clauses" are linked with *ond* (or a subordinating conjunction) and (S)OV syntax.

Foster considers that *þa* has the advantage for narrative segmentation of being "unobtrusive" and of allowing for the interspersion of digressions and descriptive material, with "the next *þa* [setting] everything straight" (1975: 409, 410-411). He admits that *þa* may be omitted (giving "zero-headed discourse units"), especially when some other form, such as an "X-spoke" formula, denotes the beginning of the narrative segment (p. 410). Likewise, Enkvist—Wårvik (1987: 231) observe that marking with *þa* is optional, with shifts in actor or action or other signals, such as time adverbials (also Wårvik 1987b: 387, 1990b: 564), denoting the beginning of an episode. Furthermore, they attempt to interrelate the various functions of *þa*, arguing that in narratives, actions are naturally foregrounded, events on the main storyline are sequenced, important descriptive features may receive special prominence, and the organization of the narrative into episodes should be made clear (Enkvist—Wårvik 1987: 222).

Foster is puzzled by the cooccurrence of *ond* with *þa* at the head of a discourse unit, wondering whether it is random, or whether it expresses intensity or a lesser degree of continuity (1975: 409-410). Looking at the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* for 755, Turville-Petre (1974: 121-123) finds that *ond þa* is "emphatically sequential", marking "new" or "main" actions in the narrative sequence, while *ond* alone is a clause connective expressing "simple sequence" and giving "background descriptions and the continuation or development of a decisive event". She concludes that "there is a systematic distinction between internal connexions (chiefly expressed by *ond*, *þæt*, and *þe*) and the major junctures and transitions (usually expressed by *ond* plus an adverb or adverbial phrase)" (p. 124).[5]

Taking issue with the view of OE *þa* as a foregrounder, Taejin (1992), in the only monograph-length study of this form, argues for its function as a "shift marker". Because she finds *þa* in "annunciatory position", with nontopical, third-person, nonhuman subjects, in clauses which are either off the timeline or irrealis, and accompanying nonpunctual verbs, she concludes that "*þa* has nothing to do with grounding theory" (pp. 80-112, 151). Rather, she supports the view of *þa* as a marker of narrative segmentation. She argues that *þa* serves as a "multifunctional indicator on a discourse-level which signals a shift of topic, ground, time-line, scene, listener, content, or any combination of these" or an indicator on a more local level of "action/thematic shift" (pp. 113-148, 152).

Wilbur (1988) sees similar functions for Old Saxon and Old High German *thô* 'then' as have been identified for OE *þa*. He first attributes the qualities of pragmatic markers to these forms: they "can be entirely omitted without

disturbance to the semantic or grammatical content of any particular inde-pendent sentence" and "their presence is dictated not by the necessities of the syntax of sentences, but by the demands of the maintenance of textual-ity" (p. 88). They are "extra-sentential" "text-forming devices". In both Old High German and Old Saxon, sentence-initial *thô* signals the "progression of the narrative", events which must come in a certain order, but, additionally, *thô* may be postposed to the verb in Old Saxon, where it denotes back-grounded information, the circumstances, reasons, and causes of events (p. 91). Thus, in Old Saxon, "by careful placement of the particle, the poet manages the flow of the narrative. He establishes a kind of hierarchy of initiating actions and attendant circumstances" (pp. 91–92). Wilbur admits that *thô* can be omitted without making a difference in meaning (p. 91). According to Betten (1992), Old High German *thô* is "a signal calling atten-tion to a new turn of narrative action" (p. 164); it has a "metacommunica-tive function" beyond its original localizing-temporal function in "directing attention to the progressions in the narrative text that are to be emphasized as new, surprising, or important" (p. 165). She considers it an oral feature "clearly firmly fixed in Old High German narrative style" since it translates Latin *et* as well as *autem, ergo, tunc,* and other connectives (p. 164). Wilbur (1988: 87) notes that the translator of the *Tatian* uses his own connectives, not the Latin ones.[6] Wilbur (1988: 92–94) also briefly examines the func-tions of Old High German and Old Saxon *nu* 'now', which serves "to recall to mind what has happened in the textual past and to account for present actions in terms of the past"; of Old Saxon *endi,* Old High German *inti* 'and', which participates more fully in sentence grammar, specifically in conjunction reduction; and of Old High German and Old Saxon *ac* 'but', which is likewise part of sentence grammar.

Apart from *þa,* discourse-marking functions have also been attributed to *her* 'here' in Old English. Clemoes (1985) sees the function of *her* in the 890 *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* entry as "directly related to [annal] style", not to the content of the entry (p. 27). He argues that *her* forms a "close relationship between year number and entry next to it" (p. 27):

> *Her* was intended to form a bridge between such a number in the pre-sent and a statement "such-and-such happened" with a referent in time past: it both pointed referentially to the preceding number in the physi-cal present and, as an adverb, modified an ensuing linguistic structure containing a verb in the preterite tense. With its meaning beamed to the present and its grammar to the past, it welded the two together in a regular, formulaic way (p. 28).

Fries (1993) argues similarly that *her* "points to the preceding Roman numerals in the sense of 'at the point we have arrived here in this text, i.e. the entry for 871'". Clemoes sees *her* functioning in analogous ways in the illustrations to Prudentius's *Psychomachia,* in the inscriptions accompanying church visual art, and in the pictures adorning the Frank's Casket (1985: 29–30).[7] A correlate to *her* in the Middle English period is the function of *hic* 'here' on the Bayeux Tapestry, which forms a bridge between the present picture and the past event (pp. 28–29). Clemoes notes that each scene in the Tapestry represents a "cluster of moments ... a succession of actions", with the same actor perhaps appearing more than once (p. 28). I would argue, therefore, that each scene denotes an episode, and that *hic* here can be con-sidered an episode boundary marker (see section 2.2.2).[8] Clemoes considers the *her/hic* formula as still closely related to the spoken language and as "attention-directing": "Applied to successive year numbers or pictures it had a 'voice' like that of a guide on a conducted tour. It kept saying 'Look at this number or picture; it signifies that such-and-such happened'" (p. 31). Thus, he seems to suggest, the formula has not only a structural function in the dis-course, but also an interactive function.

Fries (1993) treats OE *her* and *nu* as "text deictic" expressions which serve to distinguish domains in the discourse as distal or proximal. He records the use of text-initial *her* in the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* and in charters as well as of *her + onginþ* 'begins' to start a text. *Her* in conjunction with *bufan* 'above', *beforan* 'before', and *æfter* 'after' may refer backwards or forwards in the text. Fries also studies the use of *her,* or more frequently *nu,* with verbs of saying (e.g., *secgan, cweðan, sprecan*), always with a first-person subject (*ic, we*) and sometimes with a second-person addressee (*þe, eow*), in texts of religious or secular instruction and in nonimaginative narrative texts. In these cases, the text-deictic expression denotes the speaker's intention to say something here or now (or, strictly speaking, next). I would suggest that the occurrence of first- and second-person pronouns points to an interactive function for these forms as well. Fries notes that *nu* may also occur with a verb of hearing (e.g., *hyran, gehyran*), where the speaker tells addressees what they will hear or invites them to listen to what follows. Finally, *nu* can occur with a construc-tion referring to past time, where the speaker tells addressees what they have heard before or sums up the preceding passage. Fries (1994) follows the use of *here, now, before, afore/fore, above, hereafter,* as well as of *the said,* as text-deictic expressions in Early Modern English, where there is a much greater diversity of markers than in Old English.

A number of forms in Middle English have also been interpreted as pragmatic markers. An early article by Novelli (1957) seems to attribute discourse functions to Middle English *this* accompanying a proper name.[9] He recognizes at least six uses of *this* in *The Canterbury tales*:

(a) to represent colloquial or informal language (p. 246);
(b) to mark the transition between characters or a character's reentry into the narrative (p. 246);
(c) to focus attention on a previous characterization (p. 247);[10]
(d) to express the inexpressible about a character, much like a classical epithet (p. 247);
(e) to remind the reader that "someone is telling the story, controlling the total effect" (p. 248); and
(f) to characterize the teller (p. 249).

As Novelli sees it, these fall into two main functions: to achieve certain effects of narration and characterization within the tale, and to keep the narrator-pilgrim unobtrusively in the reader's consciousness (p. 249). In modern discourse analytic terms, then, *this* seems to function in five ways. First, it is a subjective marker of the narrator, as teller and as shaper of the tale. Sell (1985a: 181) sees this "continual reminder of the teller" as an imposition or intrusion which reduces politeness. Second, *this* is an interactive device which, as Novelli (1957: 247) points out, "appeals ... to the reader's whole previous knowledge of the character"; Burnley (1983: 25) sees a similar use which he terms "exophoric": that is, *this* denotes information "assumed to be mutually familiar to the author and his reader". He suggests that this use may have a "patronising and familiar tone". Third, *this* is a structural device marking character change. Burnley argues that *this* denotes not only character change but also topic change: it "marks a division, or a change of direction in the development of the narrative, marking off the elaboration of individual topics" (p. 23).[11] He terms this use "anaphoric". Fourth, *this* is a foregrounding device "directing the reader's attention to the most important word as nearest at hand" (Sell 1985a: 181). Finally, *this* is an attention-focuser.

While not centrally concerned with discourse functions, Donaldson (1981) makes some interesting observations about the role of what he terms "illogical" *but* in "The general prologue" to *The Canterbury tales*. It seems that the narrator often uses *but* with a metastatement in order to break off the narrative to perform some necessary discourse task: "Several of the narrator's adversatives occur apparently in reaction to his awareness of the rules—or of somebody's rules—governing the composition of narrative

poetry" (p. 358). For example, when Chaucer seems well launched into the narrative, he puts the "strongest possible brake on a discourse that is acquiring a speed that threatens to become uncontrollable" (p. 359) in order to introduce the pilgrims: *But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,/ Er that I ferther in this tale pace* 'but nevertheless, while I have time and space, before I proceed further in this tale' (*CT* A.Prol. 35-36).[12] Well into his description of the Knight, he remembers that he has violated his own "elementary rules of descriptive poetry" (p. 360) to tell the condition of each of the pilgrims, who they are, of what degree, and in what array: *But for to tellen yow of his array* 'but to tell you of his dress' (*CT* A.Prol. 73). Beginning to speak of the Wife of Bath's five husbands, he becomes aware "that it is wrong to speak of things out of their proper order" (p. 363): *But therof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe* 'but thereof it is not necessary to speak now' (*CT* A.Prol. 462). *But* may also be used to resume the narrative, as after the descriptions of the pilgrims, Chaucer takes up the narrative he left in line *CT* A.Prol. 35: *But now is tyme to yow for to telle/ How that we baren us that ilke nyght* 'but now is the time to tell you how we conducted ourselves that same night' (*CT* A.Prol. 720-721). Here, we see the narrator "returning again to the old rules that govern the writing of narrative poetry" (p. 365). Other *buts* which Donaldson does not explicitly identify as having an interruptive or resumptive function occur with metastatements in the description of the Prioress (*But, for to speken of hire conscience* 'but to speak of her conscience' [*CT* A.Prol. 142]), of the Monk (*But, sooth to seyn, I noot how men hym calle* 'but, truthfully, I do not know what men call him' [*CT* A.Prol. 284]), and of the Pardoner (*But trewely to tellen atte laste* 'but to tell truely at last' [*CT* A.Prol. 707]).

Noting that conjunctions and particles "may be used, especially in the spoken language, to intensify or otherwise modify the force of an expression", Roscow (1981: 50, 53-56) enumerates a number of different subjective and expressive functions for another conjunction in Chaucer, namely, *and*: to express surprise or ask the truth of something, to soften the force of a question, to give assent to a promise, to supply emphasis in an imperative, and to introduce explanatory or amplificatory phrases. He also suggests (pp. 125-127) that coordinate *and* connects rapid and often violent actions, suggesting a world of "mere sequence".

Discourse functions have also been attributed to ME *gan*; relevant work on this form will be reviewed in Chapter 3.

It is occasionally argued that *do* has a "stylistic" function in Middle and Early Modern English. For example, Mustanoja (1960: 602) notes that *do*

may "intensify the force of the verb", Funke (1922: 15-16) suggests tentatively that *do* may be an "intensive", Richardson (1991a: 104, 108) observes that *do* is a "peak event marker" in *King Horn*, and Garrett (n.d.) thinks it plausible that in the development of *do* it went through a stage similar to *gan* (see Chapter 3) in which it had scope over discoursal rather than sentential units.[13] Examining use of the form in Malory, Wright finds that *do* in dialogue points to the speaker, the emotive content, or the prominence of a sentence type ([1991]: 482), while in narrative it has a "discourse-structural role" "either [to] focus the action relative to its setting, or [to] signpost the resumption of a particular activity or narrative" ([1991]: 485; also 1989a: 83, 86, 87). *Do* highlights events, not description or commentary, thus having a foregrounding effect (1989a: 87). She speculates that the text-cohesive function of *do* derives diachronically from its use as a substitute verb ([1991]: 485, 487). Stein argues that in EModE *do* is a marker of "discourse-semantic prominence", foreground, or peak (1985: 294-298, 1990: 31-42, 1991: 359-360). As a foreground marker, *do* denotes either remarkable events or important circumstances (1990: 35). It functions as an evaluative meta-comment: "it is a gesture of 'What I am telling you now you should consider the "point" of the story, and the reason why I am telling it at all'" (1990: 36). *Do* may also express intensity, or the "expression of emotional attitude" (1991: 359). Stein believes that both the peak-marking and intensive qualities of *do* relate to its basic meaning of contrastivity (1990: 38, 1991: 362). In Early American English, Rissanen (1985: 164) notes that *do* likewise serves "textual emphasis"; repeated clustering of *dos* "underline the particular importance of a passage or … give it a strongly emotive coloring".[14]

Finally, Finell (1992) examines the rise of "topic changers", including "topic introducers" such as *now*, "topic closers" such as *however*, and "topic resumers" such as *anyhow*, in the history of English. She finds that although *well* and *now* have this pragmatic function as early as Old English, the inventory of topic changers increases over time, as certain particles acquire a topic-changing function and come to replace explicit verbal phrases, such as *and now let me tell you*, which are the typical way of introducing topics in Early Modern English

1.2.2. Phrases

Not only single lexical items, but entire phrases, typically viewed as "formulaic" or "fixed", may serve discourse functions. Two studies have

briefly considered these forms in Middle English.[15] Burnley (1983: 94) finds that the major divisions in Chaucer's "The Parson's tale" begin with the structural formulas (*Now as*) *for to speke* '(now as) to speak', *Eke for to* 'also to', and *Now ben ther* 'now are there'. In the Middle English romance *Amis and Amiloun*, Wittig (1978: 29-30) identifies a number of what she terms "minstrel tags": *y understonde* 'I understand', *as y you hyght* 'as I promise you', *as y you tel in mi talking* 'as I tell you in my speech', *now hende herkeneth* 'now hearken courteously', *without lesyng* 'without deceit', *that y of told* 'which I told of', *(al thus) in {romaunce, boke, gest} {as we say, as we tell, as it is told, as (so) we rede, as ye may here, rede we, to rede it is gret rewthe}*. '(all thus) in {romance, book, story} {as we say, as we tell, as it is told, as we read, as you may hear, we read, to read it is a great pity}'. Wittig describes these simply as phrases directed by the minstrel to his audience. In modern discourse analytic terms, we can see them as interactive, as phrases used by the teller of the tale to involve his audience; the occurrence of first- and second-person pronouns in almost all of the formulas is evidence of this function. Wittig also notes that such phrases, which she classifies as "descriptive formulas", used without restriction to narrative content, are "most often criticized in discussions of style in the Middle English romance" (p. 26).

More support for the discourse function of formulas is provided by comparative Germanic evidence. Clover (1974, 1982) argues for a tripartite division of the "scene", an integral part of the structure of the Old Icelandic saga, into preface, dramatic encounter, and conclusion. The preface establishes the persons, time, place, and situation of the scene; it sets the scene and gives the conditions for the ensuing action (1974: 62). While characters are introduced with phrases such as *Maðr hét, Maðr er nefndr* 'there is a man called/ named', the most common indication is of time, specifically what Clover designates the "narrator's time", with formulas meaning roughly 'now it is to be told of …': *Nú er at segja frá, Nú er frá því at segja, Frá því er nú at segja, Nú verðr at ræða um, Svá er frá sagt, Nú er þar til máls at taka* (see Clover 1974: 62, 72, 1982: 86-87; Lönnroth 1975: 73, 75, 1976: 45).[16] Clover notes that these forms are not "ossified" but quite productive (1974: 82). She terms these "introductory saga formulas" (1974: 72) or "narrator's formulas" (1982: 87), while Lönnroth (1976: 45) terms them "transition formulas", a name which reveals their function. For Clover (1974: 62, 82), these formulas "shift scene", "signal temporal backtracking" and "overlapping", and "subordinate action". For Lönnroth, they shift a scene within a chapter (1975: 73), mark a new episode beginning a chapter (1975: 75, 1976: 53), or generally call the reader's attention to scene shifts or other