


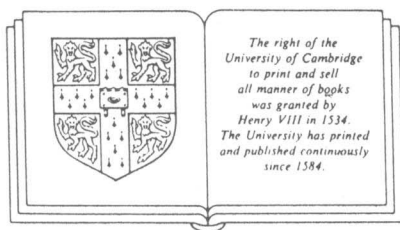
DISCOURSE
markers

well now so
but  because
or I mean *and*
y'know then

Discourse markers

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To LOUIS

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Intonation and transcription conventions

The role of intonation in my analysis

Although my analysis of discourse markers is primarily an analysis of how particular expressions are used to organize conversational interaction, the impact that a single expression has in conversation may differ depending upon the way in which it is said. For example, *oh* with a rising intonation might be interpreted as a request for confirmation, as in:

- A: I think the party's called for six o'clock.
B: Oh?

But the same expression with a falling intonation might be interpreted not as a request for confirmation, but as an acknowledgement:

- A: I think the party's called for six o'clock.
B: Oh.

Because the role of intonation is important, I have paid attention to it in my transcription conventions (see below). I have also discussed intonation when it makes a systematic contribution to the interpretation of an expression. But intonation has not received nearly as much attention as two other factors in my analysis: the expression being used as a marker (its linguistic properties) and the conversational (textual, interactional, etc.) context of the expression. It is my hope that an understanding of these two factors will act as a foundation for a more thorough analysis of the prosody of discourse markers.

Key to transcription conventions

- falling intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at end of declarative sentence)
- ? rising intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at end of interrogative sentence)

| | |
|------------------|---|
| , | continuing intonation: may be slight rise or fall in contour (less than '.' or '?'); may be followed by a pause (shorter than '.' or '?') |
| ! | animated tone |
| ... | noticeable pause or break in rhythm without falling intonation (each half-second pause is marked as measured by stop watch) |
| -- | self interruption with glottal stop |
| : | lengthened syllable |
| <i>italics</i> | emphatic stress |
| CAPS | very emphatic stress |
| Bold type | is used in the examples to highlight those discourse markers being discussed in the text |

When speech from A and B overlap, the starting point of the overlap is marked by a left-hand bracket, and the ending point of the overlap is marked by a right-hand bracket.

A: Do you know what time the party's supposed [to start?]
 B: [Six o'clock.]

When lack of space prevents continuous speech from A from being presented on a single line of text, then '=' at end of A1 and '=' at beginning of A2 shows the continuity.

A1: Do you know what time the party's supposed [to start?=]
 B: [Six o'clock.]
 A2: =Because I have to work late tonight.

When speech from B follows speech from A without perceptible pause, then \angle links the end of A with the beginning of B.

A: Do you know the time?
 B: Six o'clock. \angle Six o'clock.

When speech from B occurs during what can be heard as a brief silence from A, then B's speech is under A's silence.

A: I can't wait to go to the party! It'll be fun.
 B: Oh yeh!

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1 Background: What is discourse?

1.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a vast and ambiguous field. Consider two recent definitions. First, Brown and Yule (1983: 1) state that:

the analysis of discourse, is necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs.

Second, Stubbs (1983a: 1) states that discourse analysis consists of:

attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language in use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers.

Brown and Yule emphasize a particular **perspective** toward language (functional versus structural) which is tied to a focus on *parole* (versus *langue*); Stubbs' emphasis on a particular **unit of analysis** ('above the sentence') leads him toward a similar pragmatic emphasis on 'language in use'. The authors then observe a definitional problem similar to the one noted above. Brown and Yule (1983: viii) observe that the term discourse analysis

has come to be used with a wide range of meanings which cover a wide range of activities. It is used to describe activities at the intersection of disciplines as diverse as sociolinguistics, psycho-linguistics, philosophical linguistics and computational linguistics.

Stubbs (1983a: 12) continues:

no one is in a position to write a comprehensive account of discourse analysis. The subject is at once too vast, and too lacking in focus and consensus. . . Anything at all that is written on discourse analysis is partial and controversial.

The vastness and ambiguity of discourse analysis is also suggested by

textbooks on different approaches to language, such as pragmatics, which define this field as 'the study of the general conditions of the communicative use of language' (Leech 1983: 10) and which include chapters on conversation analysis (Levinson 1983: Chapter 6), and by edited collections in sociolinguistics (e.g. Baugh and Sherzer 1984, Giglioli 1972) which include articles that could fit as comfortably into readers on discourse analysis.

It should not really be surprising that discourse analysis is so vast and diffuse: like pragmatics and sociolinguistics, it has its intellectual roots not only in linguistics, but in the social sciences and in philosophy. Discourse analysis began within linguistics through the work of Harris (1951, 1952), a structural linguist who used distributional methods of analysis to discover recurrent patterns of morphemes which would differentiate a text from a random collection of sentences. Within the social sciences, anthropology has promoted interest in naturally occurring discourse as a culturally relative realization of ways of acting and being (Hymes 1974). In addition, the distinction between referential and social functions of language which is so important to discourse studies had its roots in anthropologist Malinowski's (1930) concept of phatic communion. Sociology also shares responsibility for promoting interest in discourse. From Durkheim's (1895) notion of social fact (a constraint external to the individual) which was adapted by de Saussure in his characterization of *langue*, to Simmel's (1911) focus on forms of social life including conversation and small group interactions, discourse has long been one of the natural interfaces between sociology and linguistics. More recent work by Goffman (e.g. 1959, 1971, 1974, 1981a, 1981b) focused attention on microanalytic frames of social interaction, including the use of language as a sign-vehicle in discourse. The phenomenological movement within philosophy (Schutz 1970) was an impetus for a school of sociology (ethnomethodology) in which the focus of attention is on the common sense procedures used by individuals to construct social worlds: discourse not only provides one of the procedures, but it is part of the social world under construction. And also within philosophy, work by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) on speech acts, and by Grice on conversational maxims (1975) forced attention to language use.

Because discourse analysis is so vast a field, readers of discourse analyses may find themselves unexpectedly confronted by terms, concepts, and perspectives borrowed from a home turf which is different from their own. (Of course, an equally disorienting problem faces discourse analysts: they may need to wander into analytic terrain which is far from their own initial start-

ing point!) I therefore want to begin this book on discourse markers – words like *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, I mean*, and *y'know* – by discussing some assumptions that I will be making about discourse (1.2) and some properties of discourse (1.3). Although I am sure that some readers will find even these assumptions and this discussion of basic properties to be disputable, I then go on to still more controversial ground: I discuss how discourse properties are to be integrated (1.4) within a model of coherence in discourse (1.5).

Note, then, that although this first chapter will say nothing about discourse markers *per se*, it is important background not only for the orientation reason mentioned above, but because it provides a theoretical background for the study of discourse markers, and a model upon which I will base both my analysis of specific markers (Chapters 4–9) and my general conclusions (Chapter 10).

1.2 Assumptions of discourse analysis

The key assumptions about language which I take to be central to current discourse analysis concern context and communication.¹

1. Language always occurs in a context.
2. Language is context sensitive.
3. Language is always communicative.
4. Language is designed for communication.

1.2.1 *Language always occurs in a context*

A great deal of sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic research has detailed the specific contexts in which language is produced and interpreted – contexts which range from cultural contexts of shared meanings and world views, to social contexts through which definitions of self and situation are constructed, to cognitive contexts of past experience and knowledge. Understanding how language is used and how it is structured depends on consideration of how it is embedded in all of these contexts. In fact, the role of context is so pervasive that it figures even in grammatical analyses whose data consist of individual intuitions about idealized isolated sentences. Not only is the introspection which accompanies intuition actually a special kind of cognitive context in and of itself, but (as teachers of introductory syntax can no doubt attest) individuals are very adept at imagining discourse contexts in which ungrammatical sentences find a natural home.

And as Goffman (1981a: 30) states, the grammarian's effort to analyze single, isolated sentences requires a general understanding 'that this effort is an acceptable, even worthy, thing to do'. Goffman (1981a: 30-1) goes on to say that:

The mental set required to make sense out of these little orphans is that of someone with linguistic interests, someone who is posing a linguistic issue and is using a sample sentence to further his argument. In this special context of linguistic elaboration, an explication and discussion of the sample sentence will have meaning, and this special context is to be found anywhere in the world where there are grammarians. . . . So all along, the sentences used by linguists take at least some of their meaning from the institutionalization of this kind of illustrative process.

As Goffman's point suggests, it is not only intuitions about the grammaticality of sentences which are inherently contextualized: so too, are intuitions about semantic meaning. Gazdar (1979: 3-4) suggests that Katz's (Katz 1977, Katz and Fodor 1963) effort to invent a sentence which is totally decontextualized (and would thus be free for semantic interpretation based solely on referential meaning) is futile precisely because inferences about contextually provided non-referential meanings can never be totally excluded. In fact, one of the problems for current research in pragmatics is to successfully limit which of the many features of context actually **do** enter into utterance interpretation.²

Thus, I assume that language always occurs in some kind of context, including cognitive contexts in which past experience and knowledge is stored and drawn upon, cultural contexts consisting of shared meanings and world views, and social contexts through which both self and others draw upon institutional and interactional orders to construct definitions of situation and action.³

1.2.2 Language is context sensitive

Not only does language always occur in a context, but its patterns – of form and function, and at surface and underlying levels – are sensitive to features of that context. Analyses from a variety of perspectives have documented systematic relationships between language and context which penetrate to all levels of language; see, for example, the quantitative sociolinguistic analyses which focus on how constraints drawn from cultural, social, psychological, and textual domains affect phonological, morphological, and syntactic variation (Fasold 1983, Fasold and Shuy 1975, Labov and Sankoff 1980, Sankoff and Cedergren 1981). Examples of the context sen-

sitivity of language could be almost endlessly multiplied from studies of the internal and external pressures on language change, to studies of how cultural presuppositions influence narrative structure, to studies of how different degrees of mutual knowledge influence language use and expression.

In sum, I assume that language is potentially sensitive to all of the contexts in which it occurs, and, even more strongly, that language **reflects** those contexts because it helps to constitute them.

1.2.3 Language is always communicative

Because language is always addressed to a recipient (either actual or intended) it is always communicative. Note that I am considering communication in a very broad sense here. Some analysts have argued that communication occurs only under certain conditions of speaker intentionality. Ekman and Freisen (1969), for example, differentiate messages which are informative from those which are communicative: the former elicit similar interpretations in observers but may be inaccurate information about the sender; the latter need not be informative (i.e. may not receive consistent interpretations) but are those which a sender consciously intends to send. Still other messages are interactive: they modify another's behavior, even though they need be neither consistently interpreted nor consciously intended toward a particular modification. MacKay (1972) offers another differentiation: communication is necessarily goal-directed and interpreted as goal-directed; whatever is either not goal-directed, or not interpreted as such, falls into the category of conduct. Similar to MacKay is Grice's (1957) well known concept of meaning-*nn* (an abbreviation for non-natural meaning): speaker's intended meaning which receives an interpretation and a response because a recipient recognizes the intention (rather than the meaning *per se*). A much broader view of communication is that of Ruesch and Bateson (1951) and Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) who suggest that whatever occurs within the presence of a sender and a receiver is communicative: so long as it becomes available to another within a shared domain, it need not have been intended as message to count as communication. Goffman (1959) makes the distinction between information given and information given-off: the first is communication in the narrow (intended and received) sense; the second is information which is interpreted for meaning, and assigned significance, simply because it occurs in the presence of another and because it resides within a shared sign system – regardless of its intentional transmission.

I assume that communication occurs when a sender either gives, or gives

off, information. Thus, I assume that language is always communicative either because it is directed toward a recipient (immediate or eventual), because it is intended to be so directed, and/or because it is attended by a recipient.

1.2.4 Language is designed for communication

My final assumption is that language is designed to reflect its communicative basis. Consider, for example, the design features of language discussed by Hockett (1958): some certainly contribute to the ease with which language can be used as a system of communication (e.g. the fact that language is a code with unrestricted displacement in time and space). (See also discussion in Lyons 1972, 1977a: 70–85.) Or consider those features of language which respond to the need for ease of comprehension: Slobin (1975) suggests, for example, that the tremendous amount of redundancy in language is designed to ease the comprehension process. Such features may be interpreted as designed to aid the recipient's end of the communication process (also Leech 1983: 64–70). Many features of language use are also recipient designed (Sacks 1971): for example, choice among reference terms (e.g. DuBois 1980) and the organization of information in sentences (e.g. Prince 1981) takes recipients' current information state into account, i.e. what information can be assumed to be shared. Furthermore, communicative processes guide the emergence and development of syntactic structures in language, both diachronically (Givón 1979, Sankoff and Brown 1976, Sankoff 1984) and ontogenetically (Bates and MacWhinney 1979, 1982, Ochs and Schieffelin 1979). And at another level of communication – the communication of social information and group membership – studies of sociolinguistic variation show how the communication of group identity leads to the maintenance or change of the sound system of language (e.g. Labov 1972d, Downes 1983).

In sum, I assume that language is designed for communication, or as Lyons (1977a: 638) states, that 'there is much in the structure of languages that can only be explained on the assumption that they have developed for communication in face-to-face interaction'.

1.3 Properties of discourse

I now discuss several properties of discourse: discourse forms structures (1.3.1), conveys meanings (1.3.2), and accomplishes actions (1.3.3). It will become obvious that these properties concern slightly different aspects

of discourse. The first two properties are largely concerned with discourse as extended sequences of smaller units, e.g. sentences, propositions, utterances. The third property is more concerned with language as it is used within a social interaction; included is speakers' use not only of extended sequences, but their use of a single unit (e.g. an utterance) within a social interaction. By examining relationships among these properties of discourse (1.4), I lead into a discussion of coherence (1.5) – which I view as an integrative property of discourse.

1.3.1 Structure

Studies of discourse structure have dealt with two related issues: is discourse structure a linguistic structure? Can discourse structure be studied with methods inherited from linguistics? One of the earliest analysts of discourse, Harris (1952), attempted to extend the methods of structural linguistics into discourse analysis: the structure of a text was produced by recurrent patterns of morphemes independent of either their meaning, or their relationship with non-textual factors. More recent approaches have based discourse grammars on transformational generative sentence grammars: van Dijk (1972), for example, claims that texts can be treated as extensions of sentences and that a text grammar can be written in the same form as a generative sentence grammar. Within such a text grammar, the acceptability of a discourse would be determined by a set of rules acting as formal criteria for the interpretability of sentences within the text. Several studies take a more liberal approach to non-textual factors in their suggestion that discourse structure reflects the informational content and structure of what is being talked about. Linde and Labov (1975) and Linde and Goguen (1978) show that the structure of specific discourse units (apartment descriptions, plans) is modelled after their informational structure and content. Grosz (1981) shows that the process of focusing on specific entities throughout a discourse is modelled after the structure of a specific task in which the referred-to entities are used.

Although the studies mentioned thus far differ in terms of their inclusion of non-textual factors, they all view discourse as a structured composition of linguistic constituents (morphemes, clauses, sentences) within a monologue. Other studies of discourse structure differ either because they focus on linguistic units within dialogue, or because they focus on non-linguistic units. Some analysts take the position that linguistic units are the basic constituents of dialogue structure. Polanyi and Scha (1983), for example, argue that discourse has a syntactic structure in which clauses belong to