

Research Perspectives
on English Discourse

英语话语的 多维研究

赵宏伟 于乐乐◎著



华东理工大学出版社
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内容简介

本书由两部分组成。第一部分由赵宏伟撰写, 主要从语用和认知视角对英语话语标记语的语篇功能进行解读, 在关联理论框架下, 分析了话语标记语在话语产生和理解中的作用。在理论分析的基础上, 本书还探讨了该理论框架对英语教学的启示。第二部分由于乐乐撰写, 主要研究中国英语学习环境下教师话语在课堂中的作用。在调查研究的基础上, 本书借助沃尔什的 SETT 框架对数据进行分析并对教师的话语进行了反思性探讨。调查结果显示, 了解教师课堂话语的功能及特点能够有效提高第二语言的学习效率。

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PART 1 A Study on English Discourse Markers

Abstract

Discourse Markers (DMs) refer to those words, phrases or sentences which can signal the coherent relations, indicate pauses, transitions, or other aspects of communication when we are talking. DMs can be used to signal either local coherence or global coherence and play an important role in speech communication. So a good command of employing DMs not only helps us process our communication smoothly but also helps us achieve coherence in a discourse. So far the research on DMs has become a focus in the field of pragmatics. However, it seems that the studies of DMs have never been more complete. Compared with other approaches, the relevance-based approach provides the most convincing and promising framework to explain the use of DMs in languages. In view of this, the present study centers its attention on the appearance of English DMs in speech communication with the purpose of exploring their textual function in communication under the framework of Relevance Theory. In addition, the study also probes what implications the theoretical framework has for EFL speaking. Therefore, the present study is theoretically and practically significant.

Coherence has always been a focus of study in modern linguistics. The studies on coherence undergo three main stages, namely

semantic, pragmatic, and pragma-cognitive. Based on the definition of relevance and two general principles, Relevance Theory is a comparatively more systematic approach to coherence. According to Relevance Theory, discourse coherence is a consequence of the hearer's searching for optimal relevance. However, the textual function of DMs lies in their helping the hearer search for optimal relevance through casting constraints upon the utterance production and interpretation. Communication is a dynamic process of ostensive-inference. For a speaker, communication is a process of ostension. He must try to make his communicative intention explicitly; on the part of the hearer, communication is a process of inference, so he must infer the speaker's implication with the help of the given linguistic devices. From the viewpoint of utterance production, DMs can be used to help the speaker organize information and produce clear utterances. The speaker will use DMs to produce the utterances with different degrees of clarity according to the hearer's textual resources, cognitive ability and sensibility, and ultimately direct the hearer towards the intended interpretation of the utterances in discourse with the minimum cost of processing effort. From the viewpoint of utterance interpretation or discourse understanding, the appearance of DMs can ease the hearer's search for relevance of utterances, and constrain the hearer's choice of context in which contextual effect is achieved. That is to say, they are related to the derivation of contextual implications, consequentially the use of DMs is to cognitively minimize the hearer's processing effort by providing an effective means for constraining his interpretation of utterances in discourse in terms of the principles of relevance. Thus DMs help the hearer search for optimal relevance, ultimately make conversation a coherent whole. This is also the very reason for their existence.

After having analyzed the realization of the coherence under the

framework of Relevance Theory, the present study probes its application for teaching DMs in EFL speaking. Speaking is a kind of interactive communication between the speaker and the hearer. According to Relevance Theory, the interpretation of an utterance depends on the interaction between the utterance and its context assumptions. Therefore, DMs' constraints on the hearer's choice of context assumptions are quite important in EFL speaking. Based on natural spoken English data, we make a comparison on the application of English DMs between Chinese learners of English and native speakers and find, compared with native speakers, Chinese learners of English are in a state of pragmatic fossilization in the learning process of DMs, especially their pragmatic functions. Then aiming at teaching EFL speaking, the present study offers three suggestions to guide the teaching of DMs. Firstly, teachers consciously offer the oral materials from the native speakers' data; secondly, teachers try to arouse their realization of pragmatic functions of DMs and teach them how to employ DMs to choose the relevant context and assist the hearer's search for the optimal relevance; thirdly, instructors try to provide as many chances as possible for learners to practice DMs in right situations and internalize their usage.

In conclusion, the present study has presented an account of how DMs constrain the hearer's selection of contextual assumptions, help the hearer achieve contextual effects or cognitive effects and make the discourse coherent. The study also explores what implications the relevance theoretical framework has for EFL speaking. Therefore, the research is of great theoretical and practical significance.

Key words: discourse markers; textual function; coherence; relevance theory; pragmatic fossilization

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. 1 Research Background

DMs as a subject of study was first mentioned in the book *pragmatics* (1983) written by Levinson, but he even did not give it an exact name. He mentions that there are certain words and phrases in English indicating the relationship between an utterance where they are and the prior discourse. Examples can be found in utterance-initial usage of *but, therefore, in conclusion, to the contrary, still, however, anyway, well, besides, actually, all in all, so, after all* and so on. It is generally conceded that such words and expressions function in a discourse without impacting truth condition of the discourse. They seem to show how an utterance that contains them is a response to, or a continuation of the prior discourse portion. Levinson only sets some examples and makes some comments on them, but he doesn't probe into this phenomenon. Levinson's research arouses wide interests from linguistic scholars. Since then, DMs have been studied generally from three perspectives of structural, cognitive and pragmatic approaches.

The first and most detailed discussion on DMs can be found in Shiffrin's book *Discourse Markers* (1987). Schiffrrin gives an explanation to the functions of eleven English DMs: *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, I mean, and you know* and treats DMs as encoding information about the sequential relations

between adjacent portions of a discourse. Schiffrin argues that DMs “propose the contextual coordinates within which an utterance is produced and designed to be understood” (1987: 315). The “contextual coordinates” refer to the discourse domain in which the marker functions, and the indexical role of the marker. According to Schiffrin, these coordinates function on five different “domains of talk” (1987: 316). These domains are:

—ideational structure, based on the ideational or prepositional content of the utterance;

—action structure, based on the action performed by the utterance (e. g. a question, a repair, etc.);

—exchange structure, based on the role the utterance plays in the turn-taking system (whether the speaker is ceding the floor, or whether they want to continue their turn);

—participation framework, based on the relationship between the speaker and hearer, and the speaker’s attitude or position in regards to the content of the utterance;

—information state, based on the state of knowledge of the interlocutors, both in terms of what the speaker knows and what they know others know.

(1987: 24 – 29)

Shiffirin (1987) examines the distribution and different interpretations of DMs in her selected data and proposes that those markers mentioned above indicate three functions:

(1) They work as contextual coordinates for utterances by locating them on one or more domains (outlined above);

(2) They index adjacent utterances to the speaker, the hearer, or both;

(3) They index adjacent utterances to prior and/or subsequent discourse.

(1987:41)

From the above, Schiffrin aims to make research on the coherent function of DMs in a discourse construction. And she maintains that coherence is achieved by DMs' setting up the relations between adjacent units in a discourse.

Secondly, the cognitive approach to DMs is mainly based on Relevance Theory proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1995). It is Blakemore (1987, 1992, 2002) who first applies the Relevance Theory to DMs. According to Relevance Theory, the process of human communication and understanding is to search for relevance; hearers interpret utterances on the basis of how they are relevant to the knowledge they have from the surrounding context. While one utterance may have a range of possible interpretations, hearers will make the interpretation that can be arrived at with the least amount of processing effort (Blakemore 1992; Sperber and Wilson 1995). The function of DMs is to help the hearer interpret the speaker's intended meaning by limiting the selection of the hearer's context. Blakemore argues that DMs express "procedural meaning" instead of "conceptual meaning", which indicate the logic relation between adjacent portions of a discourse without changing the truth condition of propositions. She recognizes procedural meaning and conceptual meaning as two different types of meaning: "linguistic meaning does not just encode constituents of propositional representations, or in other words, concepts, but may also encode a procedure for manipulating propositional interpretations in inferential computations" (1992:333). Blakemore believes DMs can guide the hearer to the interpretation intended and limit the set of available interpretations of a given utterance, then proposes three main ways in which DMs can make the relevance of an utterance; they can introduce a contextual implication (e. g. *so*, *therefore*); they can strengthen an assumption expressed, or introduce further evidence for it (e. g. *after all*, *besides*, *moreover*, *furthermore*); and they can deny, or

contradict an assumption (e. g. *however*, *but*) (1992: 137 - 142).

Thirdly, the pragmatic approach is the research on DMs based on Argumentation Theory, developed by Ducrot (1980) and Anscombe and Ducrot (1983, 1994). The theory is firstly applied to give an explanation to Spanish DMs by Briz (1993a, 1993b, 1998). The approach aims to find out the pragmatic functions of DMs in order to explain how DMs build up relations between speech acts and finally contribute to discourse coherence.

1. 2 Objective of the Study

In the 70s of the 20th century, with the advent, establishment and development of pragmatics broadly conceived as a study of language in use, there appeared a tendency to studying DMs (Van Dijk, 1979). Not surprisingly, DMs have become one of the highly explored linguistic phenomena within the current linguistic research, but the studies of DMs have never been complete. A pioneering study of DMs as a linguistic entity is made by Van Dijk (1979: 447 - 456) in discussing the pragmatic connectives *and*, *but*, *or*, *so* and *if*, and he makes a comparison between semantic connectives and pragmatic connectives. Whereas semantic connectives express relations between denoted facts, pragmatic connectives express relations between speech acts. However, the above account of the connectives is only partial, few people have ever paid attention to studying DMs from the aspect of cognition, and some remaining problems are still found existing. Firstly, how DMs function in speech communication and what constraints they have on utterance interpretation have seldom been explored; secondly, it is well known that DMs can achieve coherent force, but how DMs achieve coherent force has not been well explained from the cognitive perspective; thirdly, little attention has been paid to teaching DMs in