

10 Discourse markers: Contextual coordinates of talk

The philosopher Abraham Kaplan suggests that scholarly inquiry is guided by two divergent logics: a **logic in use** and a **reconstructed logic**. According to Kaplan (1964): 'A great deal hinges on whether science is viewed as a body of propositions or as the enterprise in which they are generated, as product or as process. An account of the norms bearing on the finished report of an investigation might well be expected to differ from one concerned with the conduct of the investigation itself' (p. 7). Kaplan suggests that 'science as process' is guided by a **logic in use**, and 'science as product' is guided by a **reconstructed logic**. And there is a crucial difference between them: 'we can no more take them to be identical or even assume an exact correspondence between them, than we can in the case of the decline of Rome and Gibbon's account of it, a patient's fever and his physician's explanation of it' (p. 8).

Most academic reports are written according to a reconstructed logic, but much of the work which underlies such reports is the product of a logic in use. Although I have followed a reconstructed logic in most of this book, I think it would be helpful to recount briefly my logic in use – for it not only explains why I included what I did, but it motivates the questions that my inquiry into discourse markers sought to answer, as well as the answers which I present in this concluding chapter.

I have focused on how a particular group of people use certain expressions when talking to each other: *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, I mean, y'know*. I began my inquiry by noticing where these expressions were used, and where they were not used, in other words, by paying attention to their distribution in discourse. Trying to describe in a systematic way the discourse in which markers occurred led me toward more detailed analyses of discourse than I had anticipated. For example, I found that I had to examine repair formats for my analysis of *oh* and *I mean*, requests (e.g. for clarification, confirmation) for my analysis of *oh* and *then*, question/answer structures for my analysis of *well, but, and y'know*, turn-taking formats for my analysis of *and, but, and so*, the re-

lationship between warrants and inferences for my analysis of *so, because, and then*, the structure of comparisons for my analysis of *now*, the notion of discourse time for my analysis of *now* and *then*, and the organization of narratives and arguments for my analysis of virtually all the markers. My efforts to understand the distribution of markers also led me toward more detailed descriptions of the speakers and their interactions with one another than I had anticipated. For example, I didn't expect to have to describe my informants' positions on controversial issues, their views of themselves in relation to each other, to their social groups, and to the larger society and culture, or their means of socializing with each other through arguments and stories. Perhaps an alternative approach would have been to start by describing all the different aspects of discourse, and all the characteristics of the speakers and their interactions, which I expected to find relevant. But in the absence of a fully developed and empirically grounded theory of discourse, my 'logic in use' led me to examine just those aspects of discourse and interaction that I needed in my analysis, and furthermore to discover what those aspects were during the course of my analysis. An alternative way of saying this is that my problem ('where do markers occur and why?') guided my analysis, and that it was the process of discovering, and then more clearly defining, specific facets of my problem that forced me to examine different aspects of talk and to incorporate them into my analysis.

In another sense, my problem also guided the development of a broader, more abstract understanding of discourse. It was in my search for underlying characteristics of discourse – characteristics which might explain why the same word was being used in two seemingly different contexts, or why two different words were being used in what had seemed like the same context – that I was forced to attend to the different layers of meaning and structure within discourse. A heightened awareness of those layers of meaning and structure then led me to search for still deeper systems that were responsible for producing coherent discourse. Thus, I began to view discourse as the product of several interlocking components: exchange, action, and idea structures, an information state, and a participation framework. (Hence, my discourse model, and its related views on coherence, which I presented in Chapter 1, were largely an **outcome** of my analysis!) And I began to view markers as having roles within those different components, and as having a function within the overall integration of discourse as a system.

But what of the expressions whose use first led me to examine discourse? Let me retrace the path: the words and phrases are used in certain locations

in discourse; discourse has underlying meanings and structures; coherent discourse is produced by the integration of underlying components of talk. Perhaps, then, we can understand why markers are used by locating the utterance containing them within the components underlying talk.

At the same time that this account was beginning to make sense to me, however, I realized that I also had to account for the fact that many of the expressions being examined were not themselves void of their own linguistic properties. Except for *oh* and *well*, for example, all the markers I have described have meanings. The meanings conveyed by markers not only restrict the discourse in which they can occur, but also influence the overall meaning of that discourse. Thus, I was also forced to consider how the linguistic properties of markers influence their function.

I transformed this path of inquiry (a logic in use) into several questions (a reconstructed logic):

What do discourse markers add to coherence?

Do markers create, or display, relationships between units of talk (ideas, actions, turns, etc.)?

Do markers have meanings?

If so, are those meanings referential and/or social and/or expressive meanings?

If so, how do those meanings interact with the discourse slot to influence the total communicative force of an expression?

Do markers have functions?

If so, in what discourse component of a discourse system (exchange, action, ideational, information, participation)?

Are markers multi-functional?

Are markers ever functional equivalents for each other?

Throughout my study, I have tried to show the relevance of my analyses of particular markers to these questions. I now address these questions more directly, first, by discussing how properties of discourse and of particular expressions combine to give markers their functions (10.1), and, second, by suggesting that markers have indexical functions (10.2). It is the combination of discourse plane and indexical function which provides a route toward a synthesis for my analyses of different markers, for it not only highlights similarities and differences among the markers, but it suggests a more theoretical definition of markers as well as the broader role which they play in discourse. And this, in turn, suggests what expressions

can serve as markers and a route through which different expressions become markers.

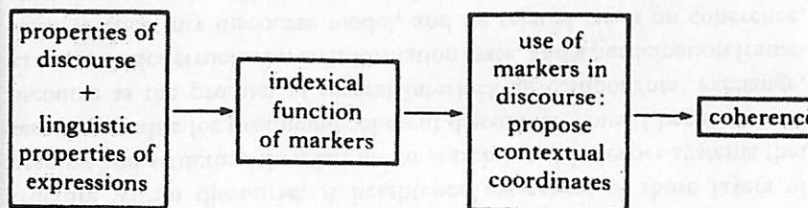


Figure 10.1. *Why use discourse markers?*

Before I begin, it might be helpful to see how these different issues are related to one another. As Figure 10.1 suggests, it is the properties of discourse (the specific discourse location as defined through my discourse model in Chapter 1) together with the linguistic properties of the expression (meaning and/or grammatical properties) which provide markers with their indexical functions: markers index the location of an utterance within its emerging local contexts. It is the indexical function of markers which is the key to understanding why they are used: markers propose the contextual coordinates within which an utterance is produced and designed to be interpreted. And, finally, it is not only because markers propose such coordinates, but because they propose more than one contextual coordinate at once, that they contribute to the integration of discourse – to discourse coherence.

10.1 Discourse contexts and the linguistic properties of markers

How do the linguistic properties of markers interact with properties of discourse to provide markers with their discourse functions? I first discuss the properties of discourse (10.1.1) and then turn to the properties of markers (10.1.2).

10.1.1 Properties of discourse

I have suggested that discourse markers are used on different planes of talk: exchange structures, action structures, idea structures, participation frameworks, and information states. Figure 10.2 summarizes which markers are used on which planes. Note that I differentiate **primary** planes of use from **secondary** planes – all the markers have uses in more than one

component of discourse (either separately or simultaneously) – by marking the former with an asterisk.¹

Figure 10.2. *Planes of talk on which markers function*

Information state	Participation framework	Ideational structure	Action structure	Exchange structure
*oh	oh		oh	
well	*well	well	well	well
		*and	and	and
		*but	but	but
		*or		or
so	so	*so	so	so
because		*because	because	
	now	*now		
then		*then	then	
I mean	*I mean	I mean		
*y'know	y'know	y'know		y'know

The primary function of *oh* is to mark information state transitions. But *oh* also works in the participation framework (since it displays speakers and hearers in particular productive and receptive capacities) and in action structures (since it marks certain actions, e.g. clarifications, which are designed to manage information state transitions). *Well* has its primary function in the participation framework because it anchors a speaker into an interaction as a respondent. But since individuals can respond to anything in talk which temporarily disrupts their expectations for upcoming coherence – ranging from unexpected knowledge, to the ideational content of a question for which they have no unequivocal answer, to a request with which they cannot comply – *well* also functions in information states, idea structures, and action structures. And since *well* is used to implant the speaker in a turn-initiation, more specifically, in one which is the second part of a question/answer adjacency pair, it also has a function in exchange structures.

The primary functions of all the conjunctions are in idea structures. But each conjunction also has additional functions in other components of talk: *and* and *but*, as markers of speaker-continuation and contrast respectively, work in action structures; so do *because* and *so* as complementary markers of motive and motivated action (e.g. grounds and claim). *Or* and *so* also work in exchange structures: both are turn-transition devices, *or* because it is a marker of hearer-option, and *so* because of its broader function in participation frameworks to mark potential participation transitions.

Although *and* and *but* also work in exchange structures, their function, because of their pragmatic effects (continuing and contrasting) are to continue rather than relinquish turns. And in addition to their other roles, *because* and *so* work in information states because they are complementary markers of warrants and inferences – both of which concern the organization and use of speaker/hearer knowledge and meta-knowledge.

Although the primary functions of *now* and *then* are in idea structures, *now* also has a role in the participation framework, because it marks speakers' attention to upcoming talk, and *then* also has roles in both information states and action structures, because it marks warranted requests. And finally, *I mean* and *y'know* both function in the information state (although this is the primary role of *y'know* because of its focus on hearer knowledge) and in the participation framework (although this is the primary role of *I mean* because of its focus on speaker orientation). *I mean* and *y'know* also have roles in idea structures, but *I mean* focuses on speakers' paraphrases of the meanings (referential meaning, speaker meaning) of propositions, whereas *y'know* focuses on the centrality of a single proposition for the overall idea structure of a text. Finally, *y'know* (like *so*) has a role in exchange structures due to its use at potential participation transitions.

As Figure 10.2 shows, then, markers which seem very different if considered just as miscellaneous expressions may actually share functions in the same discourse component (e.g. *now* and *I mean* in participation frameworks), just as markers which seem to be related expressions in other linguistic paradigms may have functions in very different discourse components (e.g. *now* and *then* are both time deictics but only the latter works in action structures).

10.1.2 Properties of markers

Although part of the communicative force of a marker is due to the definition of the discourse slot in which it is used (which is defined by its place in one (or more) discourse components), the linguistic properties of the expressions used as markers are also responsible for its communicative effect. Both referential (semantic) meaning and grammatical (syntactic) properties may contribute.

Many discourse markers are used in ways which reflect their meanings. Conjunctions, for example, have pragmatic effects which are closely tied to their meanings: *but* marks speaker-contrast because of its contrastive meaning, *or* marks hearer-option because of its disjunctive meaning. Simi-

larly, the 'result' meaning of *so* is reflected in its use as marker of potential participation transition, the opposing uses of *now* and *then* are due to their opposing values on a proximal/distal axis, and the use of *I mean* as a marker of speaker orientation, and *y'know* as a marker of information state, is clearly related to the meanings of the predicates 'mean' and 'know' as well as the fact that these expressions contain first and second person pronouns. These core meanings do not fluctuate from use to use; rather, what changes is the discourse slot in which they appear – the position of that slot in an exchange, action, and idea structure, in a participation framework, and/or an information state. This suggests, then, that markers themselves do not convey social and/or expressive meanings. Rather, markers are situated in very different discourse slots, and it is the utterance within that discourse slot which is interpreted for social and/or expressive meaning: *but*, for example, does not itself mean 'challenge' – although the utterance which it precedes may certainly be interpreted as a challenge.

Can we be more precise about how the meaning of a marker contributes to the interpretation of sequential relations in discourse, i.e. the relation between an upcoming utterance and prior talk? I suggest that markers **select** a meaning relation from whatever potential meanings are provided through the content of talk, and then **display** that relation. This means that whatever meaning inheres in the marker itself has to be compatible with the meanings of the surrounding discourse. This does not mean, however, that all discourse meanings are equally likely. Quite the contrary: such meanings may be very strongly constrained. Consider (1).

- (1) a. Sue dislikes all linguists.
b. I like her.

Without any marker preceding (b), which meaning relation is assigned depends on a number of background conditions. One is the identity of the speaker and the speaker's background beliefs. A linguist (or one who liked linguists) would no doubt interpret a contrastive relation between (a) and (b) which would be displayed by *but*. But someone who also dislikes linguists, might interpret a resultative relation, such that *so* would best display their relationship. The meanings of the propositions conveyed in the pair of utterances are vague enough to allow either of these (and other) interpretations. But because the pair would always occur in some context, some interpretation would inevitably be preferred. Another way of saying this is that once utterances are seen within their contexts, the potential meaning relationships between them is already constrained. This means that although a marker may be able theoretically to select any number of

implicit and potential relationships, in actuality, that relationship is already fairly constrained, such that the marker acts more to display the relationship.

Before going on to consider the contribution of grammatical properties to discourse function, I want to address a slightly broader question concerning meaning: how does the fact that a marker does (or does not) have linguistic meaning influence the discourse plane on which it is used? Figure 10.2 has already given us a hint, for it implied a rough correlation between the semantics of markers and their primary functions. Figure 10.3 makes this correlation more explicit.

Does the expression used as a marker have meaning?	
meaning	no meaning
conjunctions..time deictics.....lexicalized clauses..particles	
ideational plane	non-ideational plane
What is the primary function of the marker?	

Figure 10.3. *Meaning of markers and their use in discourse*

It suggests that those markers with meaning have their primary functions on ideational planes of talk, and those without meaning show the reverse tendency. Of course this correlation is not only rough, but it is complicated by (1) the fact that there may be degrees of referential meaning in an expression (thus some cases of *y'know* are less referentially meaningful than others), (2) not all elements at one end of the scale have the same degree of meaning (e.g. although conjunctions are all at the 'meaning' end of the scale, *and* is similar to asyndetic connection whereas *but* has contrastive meaning), (3) a very different scale might result were **all** the functions of markers (not just the primary ones) to be considered. But, in general, what such a scale suggests is that if an expression used as a marker **does** have meaning, its primary use in discourse will be in the organization of referential meanings at a textual level – and that if a marker does not have meaning, its primary use will be elsewhere. What this also suggests is that as an expression **loses** its semantic meaning, it is freer to function in non-ideational realms of discourse.

Consider, now, the relationship between grammatical properties of markers and discourse function. Since it is only conjunctions which have a grammatical (connective) function in sentence grammars, it is really only

and, but, or, so and *because* for which this issue is relevant. We have seen that the discourse use of conjunctions seems to parallel their grammatical function: *and, but, and or* are coordinators in discourse, and *because* and *so* are markers of subordinate and main units in discourse. But we have also seen several features of discourse that point to differences between discourse grammars and sentence grammars, and thus suggest that the principles governing use of conjunctions in discourse do not totally parallel those for conjunctions in sentences.

We saw that the structural units of talk which are marked can be either referentially defined discourse topics, or idea units which are functionally related in a larger text. Thus, within an explanation, for example, *and* can mark the referential topics and/or the functional units. Furthermore, discourse units vary in size, such that a marker (e.g. *because*) could subordinate very small units, e.g. sentence subjects, as well as larger units, e.g. an entire narrative in an argument, or sequences of reasons in an explanation. Similarly, structural units can be embedded within each other: a narrative may be a main unit to which an embedded orientation clause is subordinated, at the same time that it is itself a subordinate unit, e.g. support for a position in an argument. Thus, markers may work at more than one structural level at once. Finally, we have seen that because discourse is multi-structured, what is a main (or subordinate, or coordinate) unit in one structure, is not necessarily so in another. Thus, as we saw in discussion of *so*, for example, what seems to be a marker of a main unit in an adjacency pair need not be the marker of a main unit in an explanation.

Although conjunctions mark different levels and types of discourse structure, I do not think that they actually **create** those structures. Rather, I believe that just as markers select and then display a meaning relation, so too, do they select and display a structural relation. I illustrate with *so* and *because*, which are both semantic and structural converses. Consider the following.

- (2) a. I believe in fate.
b. I won the grand prize in a sweepstakes.

Without any markers before (b), we can infer several different meaning relations between (a) and (b). For example, (a) may be supported by (b), or (a) may cause (b). Different structural relations between (a) and (b) accompany the different meaning relations. If the speaker is using (b) to argue for the validity of her belief in (a), then (a) is a main unit of position and (b) a subordinate unit of support. But if the speaker's belief caused her luck, then (a) is a subordinate unit of cause and (b) a main unit of result.

Either one of these meaning/structure relations is possible without a marker before (b). But once a marker is used, one relation is selected to the exclusion of the other:

- (2') a. I believe in fate.
b. Because I won the grand prize in a sweepstakes.
(2'') a. I believe in fate.
b. So I won the grand prize in a sweepstakes.

Thus, either relation is possible **without** markers, but only one relation is possible with a marker. It is for this reason that I suggest that markers select, and then display, structural relations between utterances, rather than create such relations.

10.1.3 Meaning, grammar, and discourse

Consider, now, that since the content of talk constrains the interpretation of meaning and structural relations, we might expect to find that the larger the discourse unit over which the marker has scope, the less meaning is conveyed by the marker. Recall Irene's story (7 from Chapter 6) in which she reports her personal experience with a local politician as a way of accounting for her general distrust for that politician. She states her general opinion and then prefaces her entire story with *because*. The story coda returns to Irene's general position with *so*. If *because* and *so* were absent from Irene's story, however, we would have no trouble defining the story as specific support for her general position. Thus, my suggestion is that when markers have wide discourse scope, they contribute less communicative force to the overall definition of the discourse than when their scope is limited to a single clause.

The same reduction in individual contribution from the marker would result from the presence in the discourse of multiply reinforcing and redundant cues of meaning and structure – even if the discourse over which the marker has scope is much smaller. Thus, when Jack prefaces his dislike for religion with *but that isn't the point* and *the point is* ((52) in Chapter 6), the contribution of *but* is less than it would be were the meta-linguistic expressions absent.

These two sources of meaning and structure – size of the discourse unit and redundant cues – might help to account not only for a general reduction in the meaning of individual markers, but for the **absence** of markers in particular cases where they might otherwise be expected. Reconsider (3) from Chapter 3. Zelda is explaining that she is strict with her children when it is needed.

- (3)
- a. See, she is at the point now where she really doesn't run out that much so that there—
 - b. she's not driving a car or anything.
 - c. We *did* have it with the boys, uh: they weren't—they-y—
 - d. when they first started t'drive, they *did* have t'be in by twelve,
 - e. because they had a learner's permit.
 - f. We always did tell the boys. . .
 - g. I always stressed that
 - h. because I went through more with the boys than I did with JoAnn.

As I noted in Chapter 3, what gives textual structure to this discourse is lexical repetition (stressed *did*) in (c) and (d), and reiteration of part of the support (in c and f). Zelda also maintains thematic continuity on a local basis: topic is continued from clause (a) to (b), a new topic is introduced in (f) and then maintained through (h). The fact that other devices thus do much of the same work as markers not only reduces the contribution of the markers which do occur, but makes it unnecessary for additional markers to be used. Thus, in general, the more the discourse works toward conveying its own meaning and structure, the smaller the contribution of the discourse marker, and the more the marker is likely to be absent.

10.2 Indexical functions of markers

Although I have suggested that markers have linguistic properties, and that markers have functions in particular components of talk, we need another dimension of analysis if we are to go further in understanding the contribution of discourse markers to coherence. I suggest that this dimension is **deixis**, and that all markers have **indexical** functions.² Although I already discussed deixis in Chapter 8, I will do so again to introduce its relevance here.

Consider, first, that one of the qualities that differentiates utterances from sentences is that utterances are inherently context-bound: they are presented by a speaker to a hearer at a certain time and in a certain place. Speaker, hearer, time, and place are four dimensions of context which are often encoded through deictic elements: personal pronouns, temporal expressions (including tense) and locative expressions (including verbs of motion).

Deictic elements define the **deictic center** of an utterance, i.e. the locus from which speaker, hearer, time, and place coordinates are fixed, and are thus assigned a context-specific interpretation. In unmarked cases, the deictic center is the speaker, such that person, time, and place are defined

in relation to the speaker's identity, the time during which the utterance is presented, and the location of the speaker. The grouping of deictics according to whether they point toward or away from the deictic center defines a proximal/distal axis. Those deictics that point toward the deictic center are proximal (e.g. *I*, present tense, *here*), and those that point away are distal (e.g. *you*, past tense, *there*).

Discourse markers also fall into proximal and distal groups – although the deictic center in relation to which this axis is defined is determined not by situational parameters, but by discourse parameters. More specifically, the context to which markers index utterances includes both **participants** and **text**.

The participant coordinates to which markers index utterances are the speaker and hearer: a marker shows that an utterance is focused on either the speaker (proximal), or the hearer (distal), or possibly both. *Oh*, for example, focuses on the speaker – for it marks the speaker's recognition, receipt, and so on, of information. *Well* focuses on both speaker and hearer – for the one who uses *well* is being defined as a respondent (a type of hearer) in relation to a prior speaker's expectations who must also alter his or her expectations about the course of upcoming talk.

The textual coordinates of talk focus on prior text vs. upcoming text: markers index their containing utterance to whatever text precedes them (proximal), or to whatever text is to follow (distal), or to both. In other words, they either point backward in the text, forward, or in both directions. *Oh* focuses on prior text: we saw that *oh* managed information which had previously been presented. *Well* focuses on both for it is the juncture between prior and upcoming text which is being marked – the fact that the expectations proposed through prior text are not being actualized in upcoming text.

Figure 10.4 shows how the proximal/distal opposition classifies markers on participation and textual coordinates of discourse. As I just stated, *oh* indexes an utterance to a speaker, since it is the speaker who is managing information. But *well* indexes an utterance to both speaker and hearer, since its user is defining him/herself as a respondent to a prior interlocutor. *Oh* indexes to prior text, since this is what triggers the information state transition. But *well* indexes to both prior and upcoming text, since it is a mismatch between prior expectations and upcoming material which occasions its use.

And indexes an utterance to a speaker coordinate, because it continues a speaker's action. *And* also indexes an utterance to both a prior and an upcoming coordinate – since it looks forward in a text to a next idea or

action, but to one which continues the prior idea or action structure. *But* establishes the same speaker focus, but indexes an utterance only to a prior

Figure 10.4. *Markers as contextual coordinates*

	PARTICIPATION COORDINATES speaker/hearer	TEXTUAL COORDINATES prior/upcoming
<i>oh</i>	speaker	prior
<i>well</i>	speaker/hearer	prior/upcoming
<i>and</i>	speaker	prior/upcoming
<i>but</i>	speaker	prior
<i>or</i>	hearer	prior/upcoming
<i>so</i>	speaker/hearer	prior/upcoming
<i>because</i>	speaker	prior/upcoming
<i>now</i>	speaker	upcoming
<i>then</i>	speaker/hearer	prior/upcoming
<i>I mean</i>	speaker	prior
<i>y'know</i>	speaker/hearer	prior/upcoming

coordinate, e.g. because understanding the contrast marked by *but* requires attention to prior or mutually known information, or because *but* returns a speaker to an earlier point of the text. *Or*, on the other hand, indexes an utterance to a hearer and it looks both backward and forward in a text, since it is the hearer to whom a choice between prior and/or upcoming alternatives is offered.

So targets speaker and hearer (recall its function in potential participation transitions) and prior and upcoming text (since it relates prior causes to upcoming results). *Because*, on the other hand, focuses only on the speaker (since it lacks a function complementary to that of *so* in participation transitions), although it shares with *so* a focus on prior and upcoming text because it is a semantic converse.

Now indexes an utterance to a speaker and to upcoming text, since it marks the speaker's attention to a new subpart of a discourse, or shift to a new orientation. *Then*, on the other hand, targets both speaker and hearer (because it can mark a speaker's request to another) and both prior and upcoming text (because it creates a bridge from current to prior discourse time).

And, finally, *I mean* targets a speaker, since it marks the speaker's orientation to an utterance, and prior text, since it in some way continues the meaning already presented in the text. *Y'know*, on the other hand, targets

both a speaker and a hearer since it opens an interactive focus on speaker-provided information. But like *I mean*, it can also mark a speaker orientation – although it opens that orientation for hearer reaction and more general participation transition. Finally, *y'know* indexes an utterance to both prior and upcoming text, because it can look backward to mark previous information as well as forward to upcoming information.

Comparing across groups reveals some interesting similarities and differences among markers. For example, *and* and *I mean* both index an utterance to the speaker, but *and* is upcoming (an addition is coming) and *I mean* is prior (a paraphrase or modification of past text is presented). And *oh* and *I mean* share both coordinates: speaker and prior text. But they differ because of the discourse planes on which such coordinates are fixed: *oh* in the information state, *I mean* in the participation framework. *So* and *then* share the same coordinates. What differentiates them is their meanings: *so* is resultative and *then* is successive.

Viewing markers as having indexical functions allows us to answer our questions about whether markers have more than one function apiece, and whether markers are functional equivalents for each other. First, the question about multiple functions. Throughout my analysis, I have spoken as if each marker has a great number of specific functions – and at the level of detail at which I described particular situated uses of markers, this was indeed the case. That is, each marker had specific **syntagmatic** functions within the particular sequence in which it occurred because of its role within the structure of that particular sequence. But I also suggest, at the more abstract level of analysis which I have been considering here, that each marker has only **one indexical function**. It is because discourse is multiply structured, and its various components integrated with each other, that multiple relations hold between utterances – not because markers **themselves** realize a different function (one devoted to ideas, one to action, and so on) with each occasion of use. Similarly, it is only because utterances are always contextualized in more than one component of talk that markers have the more specific, situated syntagmatic roles which I have described throughout.

Consider, now, the question of functional equivalents. Many markers are functional equivalents if all that is being considered is either their indexical function, or their discourse plane. For example, *so* and *y'know* share their indexical functions; *well* and *I mean* share the participation framework as the primary plane of talk on which they function. But once both indexical function and discourse plane are considered, very few markers remain as functional equivalents. And once the linguistic properties of

the marker itself are added in, there are no functional equivalents at all. Thus, what counts as equivalence depends on how finely one tunes one's notion of function.

This observation about the relativity of functional equivalence allows us to realize that although some markers are used in the same broadly defined discourse slots, they are doing very different sorts of work in those slots. *Now* and *but*, for example, are both used in comparisons. But *now* marks the speaker's orientation to an upcoming subtopic, whereas *but* marks the contrastive relationship between the subtopics. Or consider *oh* and *well*. Although both occur with answers whose content is not totally consonant with the ideational predictions of a prior question, they do so for different reasons and with different effect: *oh* marks the speaker's cognitive reorientation to information which is either unfamiliar or not expected to be relevant; *well* marks the speaker's interactional presence despite the lack of an immediately ready response. *So* and *but* provide still another example: both occur when speakers return to the ideational core of an answer to a question. But *so* does so because this is the dominant part of the answer, and *but* does so because this is merely one functionally differentiated part of the answer. The point of these comparisons is that these markers **cannot** be considered functional equivalents – because the close observation of the discourse slot, the indexical function of the marker, and the linguistic properties of the marker, show very distinct functions being realized.

10.3 Contextual coordinates and discourse coherence

Let us turn now to the most general question underlying the study of discourse markers: what do markers add to discourse coherence? Addressing this question will also allow us to consider several remaining issues which are still unresolved.

Consider, first, that the fact that markers function on different discourse planes provides us with clues to discourse contexts, i.e. markers locate utterances on particular planes of talk. I have also suggested, because there is an underlying deictic dimension to their functions, that markers provide participation and textual coordinates within these contexts: the deictic functions locate utterances on two proximal/distal axes within their particular discourse contexts. It is in this dual sense that markers provide **contextual coordinates** for utterances: they index an utterance to the local contexts in which utterances are produced and in which they are to be interpreted. I suggest that this is why markers are used in discourse. And this

is what markers are at a more theoretical level of analysis – contextual coordinates.

The items which other analysts have defined as markers can also be seen as contextual coordinates: postural changes during interaction (Erickson 1979, Schefflen 1973), particles in American Indian languages which mark verse structure (Hymes 1981, Sherzer 1982), and *okay* in service encounters (Merritt 1984) all provide coordinates to the contexts in which particular verbal and nonverbal moves are produced and designed to be interpreted. What differs is not the function of the marker; what differs is the contexts in which a particular verbal or nonverbal move is to be anchored by the marker. My contexts have emerged from the study of conversational interaction on a local, utterance by utterance basis. Certainly other contexts are more germane to other types and forms of social interaction.

What expressions can be used as markers? One way to answer this question is to begin by focusing on **units** of discourse. Such an approach would first segment the ongoing flow of interaction into a series of identifiable chunks of activity. Attention would then focus on how participants themselves differentiate such chunks – how they display the boundaries between their jointly constituted activities. The result would be a catalogue of discourse markers which is firmly grounded in observations of how participants themselves differentiate interactional units. A key feature of this approach is that entries within such a catalogue would include both verbal and nonverbal markers for both local and global sized units. Another key feature is the likelihood that some segments of interaction would be found to be not marked at all. Assuming one still had confidence in the reality of those units, this feature could be turned to great advantage: one might then begin to look to those locations as favored locations, or key sites, for the emergence of markers.

It is at this point in this first approach that a second approach would be particularly helpful: a delimitation of what elements of language can be used as markers. I have focused here on particles (*oh, well*), conjunctions (*and, but, or, so, because*), time deictics (*now, then*) and lexicalized clauses (*y'know, I mean*). Not only have other analysts found other devices, but there are many which I have not considered:

the perception verbs *see* (used in explanations), *look* and *listen* (used in repeated directives and challenges, as well as in pre-closings), but not *hear*

the location deictics *here, there* (often used in narratives to mark surprising outcomes in the complicating action)

the adverbial *why* (used instead of *then*, as in *if he wants to come, why let him come!*, or to preface typical instances, as in *why just the other day...*) but not *when, where* or *how*

the interjections *gosh, boy*

the verb *say* (as in *say, can you lend me a dime?*) but not other verbs of saying (except in meta-linguistic expressions such as *lemme tell you*)

meta-talk (such as *this is the point, what I mean is...*; see Schiffrin 1980)

the quantifier phrases *anyway, anyhow, whatever*

This second approach would try to find common characteristics of these items to delimit what linguistic conditions allow an expression to be used as a marker. But such an approach would require not only discovery of the shared characteristics of an extremely diversified set of expressions in English: it would require analysis across a wide body of typologically diverse languages to discover what other linguistic resources are drawn upon for use as markers.³ And such an approach would require not only a synchronic perspective on the functions of these expressions in discourse: it would require a diachronic perspective which could build from analyses of semantic and pragmatic change (e.g. Traugott, forthcoming) and change from discourse to syntax (e.g. Sankoff and Brown 1976) to trace the processes by which individual expressions with semantic meanings actually gain pragmatic (and other) effects in discourse.

Without the benefit of such scholarship, I offer the following tentative suggestions as to what specific conditions allow an expression to be used as a marker:

- it has to be syntactically detachable from a sentence
- it has to be commonly used in initial position of an utterance
- it has to have a range of prosodic contours
 - e.g. tonic stress and followed by a pause, phonological reduction
- it has to be able to operate at both local and global levels of discourse, and on different planes of discourse
 - this means that it either has to have no meaning, a vague meaning, or to be reflexive (of the language, of the speaker)

More generally, an expression which functions within at least one discourse component can become a marker which functions within other discourse components – simply because of the integration among components. This means that expressions through which speakers display their orientation toward a proposition, e.g. an adverb such as *frankly*, an interjection such as *gosh*, a polarity term such as *yeh*, can become markers of other discourse components, as can expressions through which speakers organize action and exchange structures, idea structures, and information states.

A striking demonstration of the operation of such a process is provided by the adjacent use of two opposing polarity terms. In (4), Freda and Jack are talking about fate:

- (4) Jack: Nobody's really a fatalist when they face it. It's only when it's calm, you're sitting in a... the living room dis [cuss] ing it=
 Freda: =intellectual, you could say that.
 Jack: = No yeh [you're gonna fight! You're gonna] fight=
 Freda: [But not when you're facing it.]
 Jack: =t'save yourself.

Freda marks her agreement with the negative content of Jack's proposition (*nobody's really a fatalist*) with *no*; in other words, *no* establishes her alignment with Jack by displaying her ideational orientation. Freda marks the same alignment with *yeh*, although *yeh* shows her agreement with what Jack is supporting (*it's only when it's calm*). Thus, (4) shows *no* and *yeh* marking: (1) an ideational orientation toward two different propositions and (2) a single participation framework. Or consider a brief interaction which I observed:

- (5) A is a man sitting on a bus. There is a newspaper on an empty seat next to him. B is a man approaching the seat.
 B: Is this your newspaper?
 A: No yeh you can have it.

Whereas A's *no* attends to the propositional content of B's question, his *yeh* attends to the request for the newspaper which underlies B's question about ownership. A's utterance can thus be expanded as *No, this is not my newspaper. Yes, you can have it.* The point of these examples is that although *no* and *yeh* are basically polarity terms, once we view them as markers of different discourse components – markers which may begin in one component but gain functions in others – we can understand what would otherwise seem to be a contradiction.

Let us consider, finally, how discourse markers as contextual coordinates add to coherence. Recall that markers often establish more than one contextual coordinate at once. Since coherence is the result of **integration** among different components of talk, any device which simultaneously locates an utterance within several different emerging contexts of discourse automatically has an integrative function. That is, if a marker acts like an instruction to consider an upcoming utterance as speaker-focused on prior text within an information state, with a simultaneous instruction to view that utterance within a particular action structure, then the result is a type of integration between those two components of talk. Note the efficiency of this arrangement. Only one linguistic item – a discourse marker – with one indexical function, anchors an utterance into more than one discourse component at once. By so doing, it provides a path toward the integration of those different components into one coherent discourse. Another way of saying this is that markers allow speakers to construct and integrate multiple planes and dimensions of an emergent reality: it is out of such processes that coherent discourse results.

Notes

1 Background: what is discourse?

1. Leech (1983: Chapter 3) compares formalist and functionalist approaches in linguistics. (See Sadock (1984) for a critique of extreme versions of both approaches.) All of my assumptions are grounded in a functionalist approach.
2. Brown and Yule (1983: Chapter 2) and Levinson (1983: 22–3) discuss the difficulties associated with defining context, and summarize others' attempts to list the contextual parameters necessary for pragmatic interpretation of an utterance. (See also Downes 1983: Chapter 8 and Ochs 1979b: 1–60.) Clark and Carlson (1981) show that the same definitional difficulties have plagued psycholinguists, and they propose a definition of context based on common ground. I explore how some of these issues have both methodological and analytical relevance to discourse analysis in Schiffrin (1986).
3. One reason why context may be so important is that the linguistic sign is arbitrary. De Saussure (1959: 66) defined the sign as 'a two-sided psychological entity': the combination of a concept and a sound image. The concept is the 'signified' (the idea that is represented); the sound image is the 'signifier' (the sequence of sound and syllables which forms a word). Critical in de Saussure's definition is the idea that 'the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary', that is 'the linguistic sign is arbitrary' (p. 67). For de Saussure, however, interpreters are hardly free to supply their own individual meanings: 'every means of expression used in society is based, in principle, on **collective** behavior or – what amounts to the same thing – on **convention**' (p. 67). (Here, de Saussure is drawing upon the concept of social fact, developed by Durkheim (1895).) Although de Saussure does not explicitly discuss context, context enters into the interpretation process in as many different ways as does convention, and in some cases, it cannot be easily separated from convention: for example, some expressions become conventional means of acting only in certain situations (e.g. asking your dinner partner 'can you pass the salt?') or only in certain relationships. The point is that without an inherent (e.g. iconic) connection between signified and signifier, other information (such as that provided by convention and context) has to aid in the interpretation of sound-meaning correspondences.

2 Prelude to analysis: definitions and data

1. Although I will be discussing some other analyses of discourse markers (also