play a critical role in my view of discourse, and describing several properties of discourse. I then argued that discourse structure, meaning, and action are jointly integrated by speaker and hearer in their efforts to find coherence, and suggested a model of local coherence.

This first chapter has said nothing about discourse markers *per se*. Yet it provides a theoretical background for the study of discourse markers, as well as a model upon which I will base both my analysis of specific markers (Chapters 4–9) and my general conclusions (Chapter 10). Furthermore, it provides a background for my operational definition of discourse markers and description of data (Chapter 2) and for my discussion of the questions which are raised by discourse markers (Chapter 3).

2 Prelude to analysis: Definitions and data

This chapter has two aims. The first is to present an operational definition of the items I analyze as discourse markers: *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, I mean, y'know* (2.1). This definition will allow us to identify markers by some principled set of criteria: we need to know not only how to find the markers that we are analyzing, but why we are proposing their similarity. The second aim is to describe the data that I am using in my analysis (2.2).

2.1 Operational definition of markers

I operationally define markers as **sequentially dependent** elements which bracket units of talk. In (2.1.1), I motivate the decision to define markers in relation to units of talk, rather than a more finely defined unit such as sentence, proposition, speech act, or tone unit. In (2.1.2), I define brackets as devices which are both cataphoric and anaphoric whether they are in initial or terminal position. In (2.1.3), I discuss sequential dependence.

2.1.1 Units of talk

Defining markers in relation to 'units of talk' is a deliberately vague way of beginning our definition. To be sure, there have been many efforts to more precisely define units of language, as well as units of speech. In fact, we discussed many such units in Chapter 1: units defined because of their structural relations with other units, their cohesive relations, or their interactional relations. Yet, because there are many units of talk which influence the use of markers, basing our definition on a more precise unit would place a tremendous limit on our analysis by restricting our attention to just that unit.

Consider first, a syntactic unit. Although markers often precede sentences, i.e. syntactic configurations of an independent clause plus all

clauses dependent on it, they are independent of sentential structure. Removal of a marker from its sentence initial position, in other words, leaves the sentence structure intact. Furthermore, several markers – *y'know, I mean, oh, like* – can occur quite freely within a sentence at locations which are very difficult to define syntactically (see, however, James 1972, 1974). Basing the definition of such elements on the sentence *per se* would imply a dependence on, and relationship with, syntactic structure which is just not evident. (See also, discussion on sequential dependence in 2.1.3.)

Another reason for bypassing the sentence as the unit of talk by which to define markers is that sentences are not the unit most germane to understanding language use and social interaction. It is well known, for example, that speech acts can be realized through a variety of sentence structures: a request can be enacted through a declarative sentence (*The door should be closed*) or an interrogative (*Would you please close the door?*) as well as an imperative (*Close the door*). This lack of fit between act and syntactic form suggests that interactionally situated language use is sensitive to constraints quite independent of syntax (as, indeed, many speech act theorists have shown). Goodwin (1981) goes so far as to propose that sentences themselves are interactionally constructed: his argument is based on the ways in which conversationalists use verbal and nonverbal signals (especially gaze) to negotiate syntactic boundaries.

Still another reason for not basing our definition of markers on the sentence is that sentences are often difficult to identify in everyday conversation. Notwithstanding Labov's (1975) observation that the great majority of sentences in everyday talk are grammatical, Crystal (1980) presents striking examples of how indeterminate connectivity, ellipsis and intercalation of structures may so obscure syntactic boundaries as to make the identification and classification of sentences in everyday conversation almost impossible.

Defining markers relative to propositions raises other problems. Many occurrences of markers would be excluded were we to consider them just as propositional modifiers, or only in relation to propositional meaning. The causal conjunction *because*, for example, is regularly used as a link between a speech act and a reason for performance of the act. Addressing the question *Is that your newspaper?* to a commuter next to whose seat is a newspaper which he is not reading is hardly just a question about ownership: it is a request for permission to read the newspaper. Such a request can be followed by a reason – *because I haven't seen the headlines yet today* – in which *because* links the semantic content of the reason (which itself gives evidence of the speaker's attention to the underlying felicity conditions of his request) with the pragmatic function of the question. Many other markers would be likewise excluded were we to view them only as propositional modifiers: as we will see, markers not only have nonreferential uses, but such use is sensitive to units of talk which are not definable in propositional terms.

Basing our definition of markers on units of language use is also problematic. Specifying for any speech act the range of utterances through which it can be realized is a notoriously difficult task. Not only are there many speech acts which have neither direct performative verbs nor easily specified felicity conditions, but what is heard as performance of a particular speech act is so sensitive to local conversational context, and so dependent on speaker/hearer shared knowledge, that specifying such a range may be impossible both in practice and in principle. Furthermore, not all units of language use are coterminous: speech acts are sometimes accomplished in less than a sentence, in a single sentence, in a series of sentences; a speech act may occupy more than one turn at talk, just as a turn may contain more than one speech act.[2]

A unit which focuses on how linguistic structure, meaning, and act are phonologically realized in speech might seem to be a more promising basis for our definition of markers. Many efforts to find such a unit have settled on what has been variously referred to as a phonemic clause, tone group, tone unit, or idea unit. Although I am not *defining* markers in relation to such a unit, it is important to discuss some of these efforts simply because my transcription devices are sensitive to their boundaries and thus assign them (at least implicitly) some analytic importance.

The term *utterance* (Harris 1951) was one of the earliest proposed for a unit of speech. In Harris' (1951:14) definition, an utterance is 'any stretch of talk by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person'. According to this definition, an utterance could vary in size (from a single lexical item to a political speech), structural complexity (from a simple to a complex sentence), propositional content, and so on, since the only defining feature was surrounding silence.

More differentiated units of speech have been based on prosodic cues. Boomer (1965: 150) defined the phonemic clause as a 'phonologically marked macrosegment which . . . contains one and only one primary stress and ends in one of the terminal junctures'. Definitions of similar units from other perspectives (e.g. Lieberman 1967: 38–9, Pike 1945: 33) agree on the importance of falling intonation as a mark of finality of such a unit, noting that such intonation is found at the end of declarative sentences. Similarly, Chafe (1980: 14) suggests that 'clause-final rising or falling pitch is the

single most consistent signal' of what he calls an idea unit. In addition to characteristic internal prosody, Chafe (1977) has also noted that a pause often precedes the tone unit. Brown and Yule (1983: 160–4) discuss pauses as hesitations which follow tone units, much as punctuation devices follow sentences in written texts.

Units of speech are also said to have syntactic and informational correlates. Laver (1970: 69) suggests that 'the boundaries of the tone-group often, though not always, coincide with those of the syntactic clause', and Chafe (1980:14) notes that 'syntactically there is a tendency for idea units to consist of a single clause'. Halliday (1967), who presents one of the most developed and integrated definitions of a unit of speech, observed that although the tone is a phonological unit, it is also a realization of a unit of information in which a distinction between given and new information is syntactically encoded (see Brown and Yule (1983: 153–79) for critical discussion of Halliday's system).

If prosodic, syntactic, and information characteristics of speech always coincided, identifying units of talk could be quite automatic. But to add to such difficulties, there may be still another feature of tone units. Kreckel (1981: 261) argues that tone units are communicative units such that 'the lexical item within a tone unit which receives phonological prominence (= the nucleus) contributes largely to the semantic weighting of the tone unit, and, thus, to the constitution of a particular tone unit as a particular communicative act'. Although such correlations are quite striking, it would be rare for any single phonologically realized entity to always be a carrier of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic functions. As Chafe (1980: 14) aptly observes: 'it would be surprising to find that any cognitive entity is consistently manifested in some overt linguistic phenomenon, let alone a conjunction of three such phenomena.' Similarly, Brown and Yule (1983: 167–8) state that we should not be misled into believing that 'there are categorial rules which map information units on to syntactic units which are coterminous with intonationally and pausally defined units'.

Identifying markers in relation to tone units faces the same problems as does identifying them in relation to sentences, propositions, or actions: the words and phrases which I intuitively feel are functioning as markers occur in locations which are not limited by the boundaries of the unit. Although the items that I have listed as markers often do precede units of talk which have the features of tone units, these same items also occur within such units. (1) illustrates both *I mean* and *but* as preface to a tone unit.[3]

(1) **I mean** I may be wrong, **but** I'm– **I mean** that's what I'm– that's my opinion.

(2) and (3) illustrate *y'know, I mean* and *but* within tone units:

(2) So **I mean y'know** I just don't know.
(3) It's not that often **but** I gotta get him together.

Markers also occur at the ends of tone units:

(4) We have some **y'know**.

Furthermore, some tone units – those that do not coincide with syntactic and information boundaries – can be prosodically filled with the items that I have listed as markers:

(5) That seems to happen to people a lot, doesn't it? **I mean**. . .
(6) Well I think you achieve more in the long run by doing it yourself. **Y'know**.
(7) Well I guess they will, **but** um. . . I don't know when.

We are left with the deliberately vague conclusion that markers bracket units of talk. Sometimes those units are sentences, but sometimes they are propositions, speech acts, tone units. As further argument that we should not define those units more precisely, let us briefly look at some additional units which other scholars have shown markers to bracket. Merritt (1984) shows that *okay* displays the speaker's acknowledgement that it is his/her obligation to take the next move in a service encounter, and thus, that it marks stages in service encounters much in the same way as punctuation in written texts. Brown and Yule (1983: 100–5) argue that intonation marks topical units of spoken discourse as paratones, or speech paragraphs. Analysts of American Indian languages (e.g. Bright 1981, Hymes 1981) provide a particularly rich inventory of units of talk defined as to their poetic features, e.g. verses – units which are bracketed by the same sorts of particles I am calling markers. Or consider suprasegmental brackets such as rhythmic shifts or prosodic shifts which segment sections of an interaction (e.g. a job interview) from each other (Erickson 1979). And, finally, nonverbal gestures such as brow raising (Ekman 1979), gaze (Goodwin 1981, Kendon 1967), and posture shifts (Scheflen 1973) mark units (phases) of social interaction. Although these are not all linguistic elements, all of these devices bracket units of talk which are much more broadly defined than sentences, propositions, speech acts, or tone units. Were we to narrowly define the units of talk for our definition of discourse markers, we would miss this similarity – which will turn out to be important for consideration of the more general function of discourse markers (Chapter 10).

In sum, I am being deliberately vague by defining markers in relation to units of talk because this is where they occur – at the boundaries of units as different as tone groups, sentences, actions, verses, and so on. Note that in defining markers in so broad a way, there lies an inevitable temptation to use the presence of a marker as an indicator of some yet undiscovered unit of talk. Given the many gaps in our current knowledge about units of talk (how many are there? do they intersect? are they always marked in initial locations? etc.), this is not always a hopelessly circular procedure. In fact, once we are on firmer ground as to the function(s) of markers, this will become an even more reasonable procedure. Nevertheless, by defining markers in relation to units of talk, I am suggesting that we should try to independently characterize some part of talk as a unit, and then see how (if) the boundaries of those units are marked.

2.1.2 Brackets

The boundaries of units not only of talk, but of social life and social organization in general, are often marked in some way. Partially responsible for the pervasiveness of boundary markers – at least on a social interactional scale – is the fact that they provide frames of understanding through which social life is defined (Goffman 1974: 251–69). Encounters, for example, are bracketed by opening sequences (Goffman 1963, 1971, Schegloff 1972, Schiffrin 1977). Brackets at this level of social organization function in much the same way as do rites of passage at larger ceremonial levels – ratifying participants' identities and establishing the rules and procedures to be followed during an upcoming period of increased access of participants to one another. Encounters are also routinely closed with many of the same ritual meanings being conveyed – except here, a relationship is being marked as solidary despite a pending decrease in participant access (Goffman 1963, 1971; Schegloff and Sacks 1973).

Brackets work not only at different social organizational levels, but at different levels of the organization of talk. Meta-linguistic brackets, for example, can mark a discourse unit as long as a conversation or as short as a word; they can mark units embedded within larger units, e.g. reasons within explanations, or answers within question/answer pairs (Schiffrin 1980). Furthermore, brackets that begin as part of the organizational apparatus of discourse can work their way into the grammar of a language where their bracketing function continues on both a discourse and a sentence level (Sankoff and Brown 1976).

Although brackets may initiate or terminate a spate of activity, initial brackets typically do different kinds of work in discourse than do terminal brackets. Goffman (1974: 255) suggests:

> the bracket initiating a particular kind of activity may carry more significance than the bracket terminating it. For . . . the beginning bracket not only will establish an episode but will also establish a slot for signals which will inform and define what kind of transformation is to be made of the materials within the episode.

And as Hymes (1974: 150) suggests in his discussion of initial modal particles in Wasco Chinook, 'initial position for elements defining mood over the scope of what follows may be widespread, even universal'.

Despite the significance of opening brackets, it is important to note that brackets look **simultaneously** forward and backward – that the beginning of one unit is the end of another and vice versa. It is this anaphoric **and** cataphoric character of discourse markers that I want to capture by including in their definition the property of sequential dependence.

2.1.3 Sequential dependence

I use the term sequential dependence to indicate that markers are devices that work on a discourse level: they are not dependent on the smaller units of talk of which discourse is composed. Several ways of showing the sequential dependence of markers are provided by Stubbs' (1983a: Chapter 4) arguments that elements such as particles, adverbs and connectors cannot be accounted for by explanations which draw solely upon syntactic characteristics of upcoming sentences. Stubbs (1983a: 78) points out, for example, that it has been evident from the days of immediate constituent analysis that sentence grammar cannot fully deal with conjunctions: rather 'they have a sequencing function of relating syntactic units and fitting them into a textual or discourse context'. Furthermore, the distribution of other elements, e.g. the marker *firstly* as well as sentence adverbs such as *frankly*, can be constrained only by discourse and pragmatic facts. Finally, elements such as *well, now, right, you know* make no syntactic predictions (p. 68) although they do allow some predictions about discourse content.

Another way of showing sequential dependence is through combinations and co-occurrences which could not occur were such elements not viewed as part of discourse. In sentences, for example, coordinate conjunctions link items which are members of the same word class or sentence constituent, e.g. nouns can be conjoined with nouns but not with verbs, clauses can be conjoined with clauses but not with nouns. Most sequentially dependent

uses of *and* and *but* – coordinate conjunctions in sentence grammar – reflect this restriction in that they link utterances whose syntactic form is that of a declarative sentence. But we also find *and* linking a declarative with an interrogative sentence:

(8) Debby: I don't [like that.]
Zelda: [I don't like] that. **And**, is he accepting it?

just as we find *but* linking a declarative and interrogative:

(9) Debby: I wanted t'stop the first week I started!
Zelda: Y'see! That's what I said. **But** who made y'go, your father?

We also find conjunctions linking a declarative sentence with a non-sentence element:

(10) Zelda: Slim leg. Right. Straight leg.
Debby: That's right. [Yeh.]
Zelda: [Yeh.] **And** I think when my younger son– th– there's four years difference between the two: and I think he was–it was almost the same.

(11) Debby: You can [probably sit on the beach. Right. Yeh.]
Zelda: [Yeh, *I* go on the beach. Right. **So** I don't] mind.

Another kind of co-occurrence which would be a violation were markers not considered to be sequentially dependent is between the marker and a sentence-internal element. *Now* is a temporal adverb which marks the reference time of a proposition as coterminous with the speaking time. Thus, we would not expect *now* to co-occur with indicators of a reference time prior to speaking time, e.g. the preterit. Yet in (12), we find *now* and the past tense form of *is*:

(12) Jan: **Now** these boys were Irish. They lived different.

Nor would we expect to find two occurrences of *now* were both adverbs:

(13) Freda: So I em. . *I* think, for a woman t'work, is entirely up t'*her*. If, she can handle the situation. **Now** I could not now: alone.

(14) **Now now** don't worry.

Still another co-occurrence violation indicating that *now* has a sequentially dependent role is its use with *then* – a temporal adverb whose reference time contradicts that of *now*:

(15) **Now** then what's next?

Conjunctions also illustrate co-occurrences which would be violations were their sequential dependence not considered. Two coordinate conjunctions cannot occur together within a sentence, but when their use is sequentially dependent, they receive an appropriate reading:

(16) Irene: **And** uh. . .**but** they have that– they're– they're so conscious of their um. . .they're always sittin' down and figurin' out their averages.

Other co-occurrences concern the order in which elements combine. In sentences, a coordinate conjunction cannot follow *so*, but in discourse the order can be reversed:

(17) Irene: They don't even stop. **So: and** they said that they can't even accommodate us.

(18) Irene: I think it should have been like that from first grade on. **So, but** being they left them all together like this all these years, y'know. . . .

As a final argument that markers are sequentially dependent by definition, we can consider systematic co-occurrences between markers, and features of surrounding discourse. Since Chapters 4–9 provide numerous examples of co-occurrences between particular markers and other discourse devices in specific discourse slots, I will only provide one example here.

(19)
a. **And** then we lived there for five years,
b. **and** we bought– we bought a triplex across the street.
c. **And** by that time we had two kids,
d. **and** we moved on the first floor,
e. **and** rented out the second.
f. **And** his brother married then,
g. **and** lived on the third.
h. **And** we still live together down the shore.

Note that *and* prefaces all of the lines in this example – all of which are separate tone units. The tokens of *and* in (a) (c) (f) and (h), however, follow a slightly longer pause (indicated by the period in the prior line and the capitalization in the new line), and occur with a temporal marker: *then* in (a), *by that time* in (c), *then* in (f), and *still* in (h). But the tokens of *and* prefacing (b), (d), (e), and (g) follow a shorter pause (indicated by the comma in the prior line), and quite strikingly, there are no temporal adverbs used within these units. Thus, (19) is neatly segmented into time periods through the use of a cluster of devices: pauses, temporal adverbs, and *and*. Such co-occurrences provide an argument that use of *and* in (19)

is dependent not on the individual clauses, but is sequentially dependent on the structure of the discourse.[4]

2.1.4 Operational versus theoretical definitions

My operational definition leaves many questions unanswered – even questions of a definitional sort. Consider the many different items that I am grouping together as markers: *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, I mean, y'know*. Are these items members of a single word class? Are they constituents in a discourse grammar? What methods would we use to discover such membership: co-occurrence restrictions, semantic and/or functional criteria? Are such methods appropriate for discourse? Is it possible to define so disparate a list of items in a way which will let us identify other elements as members of the same class? What of the paralinguistic and nonverbal markers we mentioned in (2.1.1)? Although formally different, they are functionally similar.

Complicating the effort to see these items as members of a single class is the fact that some of them are members of other word classes: *and, but, or, because* are conjunctions; *so* is sometimes conjunction, sometimes adverb; *now* and *then* are adverbs. But what of *I mean*, and *y'know*? Although *y'know* is a clause, *I mean* is not a clause because the verb *mean* requires a second argument. And what of *oh* and *well*? These have been labelled adverb, interjection, filler, particle (Stubbs 1983a, Svartvik 1980); in short, there is little agreement as to the class to which these words belong. But even if we could clearly assign each member of our list to a word class, this would only complicate our efforts to define them as a single class of discourse items, for each word could bring characteristics from its other class membership into the discourse class. And, finally, how do we know that these are the only word classes from which discourse markers could be drawn, or if all the items from such a class are potential discourse markers?

Answers to many of these questions will have to wait until **after** my analysis of markers in Chapters 4–9, because it is then that we will be able to propose a **theoretical definition** of markers. Such a definition will be an **outcome** of my analysis of how markers are used in everyday conversation. This separation of operational from theoretical definition not only allows me to ground my answers to the above definitional questions – as well as my theoretical conclusions about markers – in what speakers and hearers do with these elements, but it also makes a claim about what linguistic classification is supposed to represent: how people use language, and what they use language for. Thus, in Chapter 10, I define markers at a more theoretical level as members of a **functional** class of verbal (and nonverbal) devices which provide contextual coordinates for ongoing talk. It is then that we will see that the many different items which become **used** as markers are so used because of certain characteristics which make them available as sequentially dependent brackets of units of talk.

2.2 Data

My analysis of discourse markers is based on data collected during sociolinguistic interviews. I discuss issues raised by a corpus of sociolinguistic interviews, and describe features of my own corpus in (2.2.1); I then turn to issues concerning speaker identity in (2.2.2).

2.2.1 Sociolinguistic interviews

The main goal in all sociolinguistic interviews is to minimize the effect of the observer's paradox (Labov 1972c) – to observe speakers' everyday use of language without distorting it through the process of observation. In order to accomplish this goal, a variety of interviewing techniques, and more general interactional strategies, are regularly used during the interview itself. In addition, sociolinguistic interviews are often combined with more comprehensive and long range studies of the neighborhoods in which informants live. This not only increases one's familiarity and relationship with informants, but provides opportunities for closer interpretations of norms of language use. The net result of sociolinguistic interviews and neighborhood studies is a data base which compromises some of the deficiencies of other methods of sociolinguistic data collection, such as surveys and participation observation, because it provides both a large body of vernacular speech, and the sort of background knowledge of norms and values needed to interpret the individual, cultural, and social meanings of that speech. (See Labov 1984a for extensive discussion of advantages and disadvantages of different sociolinguistic methods of data collection.)

Note, however, that using sociolinguistic interviews – or indeed, any recorded discourse – in which one has been a participant raises some delicate problems of data control. Being a participant in conversations which later become objects of analysis complicates the observer's paradox: although the goal is to observe everyday language without distorting it through the process of observation, two added risks of distortion develop because of the analyst's participatory status. The first risk develops at the time of the discourse, when the analyst's role in the discourse influences its development. The second risk develops at the time of analysis: what is the analytic

role of interpretations and knowledge gained from participatory experience in the discourse? Ideally, one should be able to apply uniform standards of analysis to discourse – regardless of one's own role (or lack of role) in a discourse. But it may be as difficult for linguists to apply uniform standards to discourse analysis as it has been for anthropologists to conduct objective ethnographies (see Agar 1982). And it may turn out to be just as unwise: since social realities are constructed at least in part from individual efforts to make sense, what is one person's definition of what is going on may differ markedly from another's, making a search for consensual (and uniform) definitions a fruitless task.

A corpus resulting from sociolinguistic interviews nevertheless has the potential for being very useful in the analysis of discourse markers. Not only does such a corpus provide a large body of data which allows quantitative as well as qualitative analyses (Chapter 3, 3.4 explains why both are important), but the corpus provides variety in mode of conversational exchange, containing question/answer pairs, story rounds, arguments, clarifications, directions, and so on. It also includes various modes of monologic discourse, e.g. narratives, explanations, descriptions, and a range of speech acts, e.g. requests, challenges, boasts. We will see that this variety is essential for analysis of discourse markers: *well*, for example, is very frequent in question/answer pairs and request/compliance sequences, but *oh* is frequent in repairs, explanations and acknowledgements.

However, given that sociolinguistic interviews have been described as a question/answer format (Wolfson 1976) and as speech situations which inhibit informal talk, why is my corpus useful – or even suitable – for an analysis of discourse? I can isolate four reasons.

First, my interviews were group interviews. The advantages of talking with several informants at a single interview are well documented (e.g. Labov 1984a). During my interviews, people often addressed one another in addition to (or rather than) me, they prompted each other to speak, e.g. to retell a family story or a favorite joke, they sometimes argued with each other and fought for the floor, and sometimes reinforced each other through the joint construction of stories, descriptions, and explanations. In short, the fact that my interviews were two, three and four party interactions meant that a variety of participation frameworks could form and reform.

Second, I shifted my own role within the interviews. Although I at times occupied my more official role as someone who wanted to gather information, I also conveyed distance from that role, sometimes tailoring my conduct according to other role expectations. For example, I routinely told

people – about halfway into the interview after they had already expressed their own views on intermarriage – that I was dating someone of a different religion, thus, turning a more abstract topic into one with personal and immediate relevance. Speakers reacted with directives, e.g. 'You have to follow your own heart and your own mind' (Jan), with consolation, e.g. 'You could be very happy honey' (Ira), with pleas, e.g. 'It's your life, but, for God's sake, think about what I told you' (Henry), and with personal questions, e.g. 'Well how will your folks accept it?' (Freda). Thus, after reading a fragment of the transcript from one such conversation, a colleague asked if it was a recorded conversation with my parents. And one of the speakers (Henry) requested that I play our taped conversation for my father; another (Jack) stated that he had taken advantage of his age. The point is that people responded to me through a variety of roles – as I did to them.

A related factor is that I share a Jewish identity with the speakers. Not only did those I interviewed ask me to confirm their own assessments of my religion, but so too, did other Jewish speakers in another neighborhood in which I did further fieldwork; after receiving such confirmation, one woman said that she could then speak freely (although what she spoke about had very little to do with either religious or ethnic identity). Of course, sociolinguistic fieldwork cannot always be limited to those with whom religious, ethnic, or racial identity is shared. But interviewers can always allow informants the leeway to make public their assumptions and questions about interviewer identity – thereby increasing their personal involvement with the interviewer. And interviewers can always work to identify some common ground and shared identity with interviewees.

Another factor which helps account for the usefulness of my data is the ethnic style of the speakers, and more generally, norms for speaking among Jewish Americans. Although we are far from having a full ethnography contextualizing and detailing such norms, beginning work suggests that Jewish conversational style is characterized, among other things, by conversational overlaps, personal topics, and storytelling (e.g. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1974, 1975, Tannen 1981). My informants also disagreed with one another in ways which suggested their use of argumentative forms of talk for sociability (Schiffrin 1984a, Simmel 1961, original 1911). For example, they disagreed not only about topics which are inherently disputable, e.g. religion, politics, but questions which had been minimally answered with just the information requested by speakers with different backgrounds prompted sustained disagreement among my informants: questions about the location of a family doctor, belief in fate, educational

background, solutions for personal problems, childhood games, location of friends and family, evaluation of local restaurants, who to invite to a party. Topics which speakers themselves developed also led to sustained disagreements: current movies, pets, music, travel. As one speaker, Jack, observed to me toward the end of one evening, 'They should have more interesting questions than this!' Jack's wife Freda disagreed with 'Maybe she didn't get a chance to ask the interesting questions' (implicating that Jack's long-windedness had prevented me from getting to those questions), and Jack came back with 'No, we made it interesting between us. . .the three of us.' Other speakers, Irene and Henry, argued (according to Irene) 'all the time, all the time'. According to Henry, 'If I want t'get my adrenalin worked up, she comes in' and 'if I say anything, she jumps down my throat!' And as Zelda, Henry's wife, warned one night when next-door neighbor Irene entered their kitchen, 'Oh, you better watch it!'

2.2.2 The speakers

Although I have described several features of my sociolinguistic interviews, what of the speakers themselves? Although one can never be totally sure of locating the most salient speaker characteristics for any linguistic study, discourse studies present two obstacles to analysts' attempts to isolate salient social characteristics. First, unlike other areas of sociolinguistics, discourse analysis does not offer guidelines based on cumulative results from past studies. For example, if one sets out to study phonological variation within a speech community, one often finds prior work showing that in similar communities, certain social attributes have correlated with phonological differences. Thus, one finds a ready-made list by which to categorize individuals in one's own community: age, gender, social class, race, ethnicity, network membership, and so on. But the degree to which discourse analyses incorporate characteristics of speakers varies tremendously. At one end is Labov and Fanshel (1977) in which a body of general propositions derived from knowledge of the speaker's full network of relationships, and social obligations and expectations, is built into the analysis of a single utterance. At the other end is Halliday and Hasan (1976) in which a broad range of texts written by a variety of authors provide data. Ethnomethodological analyses of conversation often reject the view that social status is a static attribute of speakers (Cicourel 1972), and thus draw instead upon data collected from strangers as well as acquaintances. Still another approach to the problem of socially characterizing speakers is to move away from external social attributes to intersubjective qualities of

individuals, e.g. their personal styles and strategies (e.g. Tannen 1984). Such an approach can reach an extreme in which only one's own speech can afford sufficient subjectivity for analysis, offsetting the gain in depth of insight by a tremendous loss of generalizability.

Consider, now, that knowledge of social attributes is valuable to linguistics only if the feature being examined is in fact sensitive to social differences. It is here that a second obstacle lies: how do we find out whether particular discourse features are socially distributed? Many features of interest to discourse analysts – strategies, genres, sequential structures – are so tied to social interaction, and to features of an ongoing conversational situation, that it is difficult to isolate more static attributes of speakers (age, social class, etc.) as factors responsible for the appearance of a particular form. Even though some markers are socially evaluated and stigmatized, e.g. *y'know, I mean*, their use is so embedded in their conversational context, and so tied to features of the ongoing and evolving conversation, that one cannot be sure that it is social status differences among speakers that are responsible for different patterns of discourse, and not some fluctuation in the conversational context or in participants' definitions of the situation. In sum, the situated nature of discourse makes it difficult to know to which social differences (if any) discourse features are sensitive.

Characterizing the speakers whose discourse markers we are studying is difficult, then, because we do not know which social features to describe, or even whether discourse markers are linguistic features which are socially distributed within a speech community. With these difficulties in mind, let me introduce the speakers who will speak for themselves in the rest of the study. The Philadelphia neighborhood in which the speakers live is a lower middle class urban area situated between a working class Black neighborhood and an upper middle class White suburb. During the post World War II period when government loans to veterans greatly increased their opportunities to own single family dwellings, the area underwent its greatest period of development: it was then a close-in suburb whose modest brick row houses with lawns in front were considered ideal for young families. Although no longer a suburb, the neighborhood currently maintains much of its initial appeal. Settled there now is a mix of both original residents and more recent residents. Although the neighborhood is mixed ethnically (all White, mostly Italian and Jewish Americans), the speakers on whom I focus here are all Jewish.

I entered the community several years after preliminary interviews had been carried out by students in a sociolinguistics field methods class. Four of the speakers who appear in this study had been interviewed before

(Henry, Zelda, Irene, Freda); two (Ira, Jan) were interviewed because they had been named by others as friends; one (Jack) was interviewed because he is Freda's husband. Establishing the social relationships between speakers on the block was important because my particular interviews were designed not only to learn more about the Philadelphia speech community, but to understand neighborhood communication patterns throughout the city and to establish comparative indices of local communication.

Henry and Zelda are a middle-aged couple with two married sons, three young grandchildren, and one teenage daughter. Both are first generation Americans, their parents having emigrated from the Soviet Union shortly before they were born. Henry is old fashioned ('I come with a different generation') and values tradition ('I don't understand the ways of today'). He talks at length ('Let's get back because she'll never get home', 'Two words! You'll have her here all night!'). Much of his talk can be characterized as soapbox style (Labov 1972c), i.e. he gives opinions without being asked, seeming to address them to audiences wider than those present.

Zelda was the most openly conscious of the tape recorder at our first interview, and in the beginning of the interview, she was relatively quiet ('I'm lettin' you and him talk'). Zelda initially talked more with Irene, a neighbor who was also present during two interviews. During our second interview for which Henry was not present, however, Zelda offered many descriptions of her family, her experiences, and her beliefs; after that interview, she talked more even when Henry was present, sometimes joining Irene's side in disagreements or disagreeing with Henry on her own.

Irene is Zelda and Henry's younger next-door neighbor. Other than a brief time in New York City as an infant (the city where her parents were born and raised), Irene spent her life in Philadelphia neighborhoods close to her present home. She has been married for eighteen years to her high school sweetheart Ken, and they have four children, the oldest of whom is a classmate of Henry and Zelda's teenage daughter. Irene and Zelda share neighborhood life ('Y'know she's been a big help t'me like since I'm workin''). Irene is openly assessed by Henry as a good neighbor ('She's got more sense and nicer than all of them put together') but not a best friend because of their age differences. Although Irene and Henry disagree frequently, Henry is the first to defend Irene ('I feel that she's got a raw deal on things').

Jack and Freda are another middle-aged couple, both born and raised in Philadelphia; like Henry and Zelda, their parents emigrated from the Soviet Union. They have two teenage sons. Jack prides himself on being untraditional ('Well I was a rebel thirty-five, forty years ago'). For example, he sees himself as a Communist ('They're on their way up'), he disapproves of religious loyalties ('The point is religion is a sickening thing with me') and American films ('Tinsel!'). Jack is also a self-taught 'scholar on political science' and classical music, who was once the local committee man and who still plays classical music in his basement.

Freda expresses more traditional views than Jack (on religion and politics, for example). She often disputes not only the positions with which she disagrees, but Jack's right to state a position on which they share a view. But she also openly boasts about Jack ('I think my husband's pretty sensitive'), defends him in neighborhood disputes ('I felt that he was being stepped on'), and turns to him for explanations on issues such as the historical roots of Polish anti-Semitism. Freda initially refused vehemently to talk to me, but she changed her mind almost immediately when Jack (who was eager to talk) began to do so – to the extent that Jack had to admonish her with 'She's *asking me* the questions! *I'm* doin' the answering!'

Ira and Jan are another middle-aged couple who live next door to Jack and Freda. Although their social and cultural backgrounds are similar to those of the other couples, Ira and Jan are slightly more middle class: Ira is a white collar office worker (Henry is a plumber, Jack is a salesman, Irene's husband Ken has a small family business), and their two children are college educated (one is a lawyer). In contrast to Henry's soapbox style, and Jack's self-aggrandizing and didactic style, Ira gives an impression of careful thought and reasoned opinions, giving long explanations, for example, as to why urban neighborhoods change. Jan is characterized by her neighbor Jack as someone who 'knows everything and everybody', or as Freda says, 'Jan is alert.' Ira and Jan were the least argumentative of all the couples interviewed; rather, they often constructed joint stories and descriptions. Jan usually initiated the joint construction of such discourse, claiming that in contrast to Ira ('He's a quiet person and he doesn't socialize a lot'), she is 'the big mouth in the family'.

2.3 Summary

This chapter has operationally defined discourse markers and described the data on which my analysis is based. It is worth noting that some of the same general issues have had to be confronted in both tasks, and that these dilemmas are due to the nature of discourse analysis. As I implied through much of my discussion, deciding which discourse unit to study, how to define that unit, and how to select data are often tasks which do not receive

much guidance from previous analyses. Although this is partially because of the vast and ambiguous nature of discourse analysis (Chapter 1, 1.1), I believe that this openness is also an intentional and valuable part of discourse analysis because of the reciprocal relationships that it assumes will hold among theory, analysis, and data. As I stated in (2.1.4), my theoretical definition of discourse markers will follow my analysis. This allows me, first, to ground my answers to definitional questions and my general conclusions about markers in what speakers and hearers do with these elements. Second, and more generally, it allows me to make a claim about what linguistic categories and analyses are supposed to represent: how people use language, and what they use language for. Note, then, that people are necessarily involved in this approach to linguistics – people who are inherently subjective and individual. It is because of these qualities that it is difficult to imagine any *a priori* answers about whose discourse to study, and about which qualities of those speakers will turn out to be important. But, again, this can be a gain, not only because data and analysis can again inform theory in surprising and unexpected ways, but because continual attention to the tremendously rich and varied resources which people draw upon in talk, and the continual search for ways to understand and explain what people say, mean, and do, cannot help but enrich our appreciation of human wisdom and creativity.

3 Questions: Why analyze discourse markers?

The analysis of discourse markers is part of the more general analysis of discourse coherence – how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meanings, and actions to make overall sense out of what is said (see Chapter 1). Within this very general domain of analysis, however, there are several more specific issues which are also addressed through the study of discourse markers. I will illustrate these issues by discussing the markers in several segments of discourse in (3.1) and (3.2), and then summarize them in (3.3). The particular problems raised by markers suggest a method of analysis which builds on the complementary strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and which aims to be both sequentially and distributionally accountable (3.4).

3.1 Markers and the emergence of coherence

The discourse in (1) is a rhetorical argument through which a speaker (Irene) is defending a position – her belief in fate – by presenting personal experiences to serve as evidence, or support, for that position.

(1)
a. I believe in that. Whatever's gonna happen is gonna happen.
b. I believe. . .that. . .**y'know** it's fate.
c. It really is.
d. **Because** eh my husband has a brother, that was killed in an automobile accident,
e. **and** at the same time there was another fellow, in there, that walked away with not even a *scratch* on him.
f. **And** I really fee–
g. I don't feel y'can *push* fate,
h. **and** I think a lot of people *do*.
i. **But** I feel that you were put here for so many, years or whatever the case is,
j. **and** that's how it was meant to be.
k. **Because** like when *we* got married,
l. we were supposed t'get married uh: like about five months later.