

Recenzió

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**Kerstin Fischer (ed.):
Approaches to Discourse Particles**

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Approaches to Discourse Particles, a collection of twenty-three papers, each written by a different author, presents an invaluable contribution to both the narrower field of discourse particle/marker research and the broad fields of pragmatics and discourse analysis. As far as the former is concerned, despite the rapidly growing body of research on linguistic expressions referred to as discourse markers (henceforth DMs), discourse connectives, discourse operators, discourse particles, cue phrases, pragmatic markers, framing devices, etc. (the list could go on as a function of the number of theoretical frameworks that have been applied to the study of these items), and despite the general agreement on the importance of such items in utterance interpretation, there is a lot of controversy over the type of meaning they express and the criteria one can use to assign DM status to a given token of a linguistic item. The heterogeneity of the research field is mainly caused by two properties displayed by DMs (items such as *you know, well, I mean, oh*, etc.): their extreme context-dependence and multifunctionality. Further challenges posed by DMs include the fact that there is no generally agreed list of all the formal and functional features such items invariably display, therefore there is no agreement with regard to which items actually belong to the category of DMs, what is more, according to some authors, it is uncertain if there *is* a category of DMs, at all (cf. e.g. Blakemore 2002).

As a result of the challenges posed by DMs, many authors feel that DM research might serve as a “spearhead discipline” (p. 39) with respect to discourse analysis, pragmatics and general linguistic theory at large, as many of the former notions about the semantics/pragmatics interface, the notion of coherence, procedural meaning, differences between speech and writing, theories of grammaticalization, gender-preferential differentiation, etc. have had to be reconsidered in the light of the findings in DM research.

Approaches to Discourse Particles makes an attempt to present an overview of the spectrum of approaches to discourse particles/markers in their richness and variability on the one hand, and of the major challenges and controversies DMs pose to the researcher, on the other. Because of the breadth and heterogeneity of the field and the complexity of the problems involved, presenting such an overview in a single volume equals “aiming at the impossible” (p. 1). In the present reviewer’s opinion, however, such an impossible task could not have been achieved in a more efficient way than in this volume. My unconditional praise for the editor’s achievement stems from two facts: first, she has managed to convince a surprisingly great number of renowned scholars to contribute to the volume,

second, despite the heterogeneity in the individual scholars' approaches, all contributions follow a consistent structural pattern which makes it extremely easy for the reader to find his or her way through the terminological and theoretical jungle characteristic of DM research.

Accordingly, in section one of each paper/chapter contributors comment on the distinction between DMs and other linguistic items that may share some properties with them and the question whether DMs constitute a semantic, syntactic, or functional class (or no class at all). In this section the authors are also asked to explain which terminology they prefer to use and why and to formulate a definition of the class of items they focus on.

Section two is designed to contain information on the many different functional interpretations DMs may support, the different communicative purposes they may serve, the context dependence/sensitivity of their meanings, their "homonyms" in other word classes, and the relationship between functional interpretation and syntactic position, intonational properties, etc.

In section three individual authors take a stand with respect to the issues of context-dependence and multifunctionality both in terms of DMs as lexical items and with respect to contextualized tokens/occurrences of DMs. A number of the authors also comment on how to account for the relationship between DMs' functional interpretation and their formal properties.

In the first, introductory chapter Fischer manages to bring system into the seemingly chaotic state of DM research by structuring the spectrum of approaches according to different dimensions (along the lines of DM's integratedness into their host units, the researcher's interest in written and spoken texts, a focus on DMs' connecting functions as opposed to those regarding conversation management, etc.). After providing the reader with such organizing principles of the spectrum of approaches, she goes on to comment on the problem of the extreme multifunctionality DMs display, which is alternatively handled by respective scholars in terms of monosemy, homonymy and polysemy. The choice between these approaches is, naturally, not specific to research on (mostly) non-truthconditional items such as DMs, but is a problem widely acknowledged in the literature on lexical semantics (cf. Lyons 1977, Cruse 2000: 109, 114). In the case of DMs, however, the issue is even more poignant since their dependence on context makes it even more difficult to identify a set of meanings/functions of a given item and possible interrelations between them.

The traditional way of dealing with the multifunctionality of discourse particles is homonymy. Proponents of this approach attribute meaning variations to the semantics of the individual item, thus specifying a large number of senses (encoded directly in the lexicon), corresponding to the different contexts in which individual DMs occur. Such an approach is mostly referred to as 'meaning maximalism' or the 'maximalist approach'. Meaning maximalism is thus essentially of a radically semantic nature.

At the other extreme, a strict minimalist will attempt to isolate a single 'core' meaning, usually of a highly abstract and schematic nature, from which all uses of a given item can be derived. Any observable variations in the meaning and use of a given word or construction will then be attributed to its interaction with the context in which it occurs. Meaning minimalism is, in other words, a radically pragmatic approach, in which semantics has very little work to do.

Scholars who take the third alternative, the 'polysemy' approach assume that DMs do indeed have inherent, context-independent senses which are not merely a matter of pragmatics, but that rather than being homonymous and discrete, they are related in a (usually)

non-predictable, but nevertheless motivated way, either in a chain-like fashion through family resemblances, or as extensions from a prototype.

The authors who contributed to the volume are divided between the monosemy and the polysemy approach (no one considers homonymy a valid standpoint). However, even those taking the former approach as a starting point usually attempt to account for an individual DM's range of functions by relating them to the item's invariant core meaning and explaining the motivation/mechanisms that explain how those functions are taken up in context.

In the following, I am going to give a brief summary of some of the contributions to the volume by highlighting the individual author's approach, methodology, and major findings. Unfortunately, because of space considerations, I cannot summarize all twenty-three of the papers. I am hopeful, nevertheless, that my selection will reflect the complexity of the issues involved in DM research and will illustrate the thoroughness with which the volume under review treats them.

After Fischer's introductory chapter the volume starts with papers that take the polysemy approach. In Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen's paper, for instance, the uses of *toujours* in modern French are discussed. After considering both propositional and nonpropositional (modal and discourse marking) uses of *toujours*, Hansen concludes that they form a radial category with the temporal "globally affirmative" use at the centre, from which all the other uses can be derived (p. 36).

Karin Aijmer, Ad Foolen and Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg bring up some of the terminological, theoretical and methodological problems DM research struggles with and propose the "translation method" as an alternative methodology for the study of DMs (pp. 101 ff.). They argue that comparing translations of a text can "help to reveal the meaning of markers which might be less accessible in a monolingual approach" (p. 113). They offer their method as a heuristic for establishing "contrastive semantic-pragmatic fields" (ibid.).

Eddy Roulet uses the Geneva model of discourse organization as a "necessary complement" to lexical analyses of DMs (which he calls Text Relation Markers). In his view the Geneva approach to DMs not only contributes to the precise description of generic and specific DMs but also leads to an understanding of the "interaction between lexicon, syntax, and discourse structure" and of the processes of grammaticalization.

The second part of the volume (a collection of papers whose authors take monosemy-based approaches to DMs) starts with Ler Soon Lay Vivien's relevance theoretic approach to DMs in Singapore English (pp. 149 ff.). Unlike most scholars who take an RT perspective on DMs (cf. e.g. Blakemore 2002, mentioned above), she assumes that DMs do form a class, in fact, she distinguishes between DMs and discourse particles, an issue introduced in the editor's foreword as well. Ler Soon Lay addresses the polyfunctionality of DMs by postulating a single instruction that is applied to different contexts. Within this framework Singapore English *lah*, for example, conveys the "speaker's desire for the hearer to recognize a shared assumption made manifest in the context". She argues that this instruction accounts for all the functions ascribed to *lah* in the literature, including marking solidarity, emphasis, obviousness, persuasion, friendliness, hostility, etc., thus she claims to provide a unified account of the DM under scrutiny.

Bruce Fraser's paper (pp. 189 ff.) outlines a typology of pragmatic markers and argues that DMs form only one subclass, the others being "basic pragmatic markers" (a class that overlaps with items that are called Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices in a different

pragmatic model), “commentary pragmatic markers” such as *fortunately*, *sadly*, *frankly*, etc. and, finally, “parallel pragmatic markers”, a group that includes “deference markers” and “conversational management markers”. Fraser thus narrows down the definition of DMs to include only items that “signal a relation between a discourse segment which hosts them and the prior discourse segment”. The paper also includes an exhaustive list of DMs’ phonological, morphological and syntactic properties as well as a proposed taxonomy of DMs’ subtypes according to the semantic relationships reflected in their use.

Deborah Schiffrin (the “mother of DM research” according to many) discusses DMs in general and *and* in particular in terms of their indexicality with reference to different domains of discourse (along the lines of her seminal book on DMs, Schiffrin 1987). She argues that DMs are multifunctional on two different levels: on the one hand we can observe polyfunctionality on the lexical level, on the other, DMs “in toto” perform multiple functions, i.e. individual DMs may select one (or more) from a range of possible meanings depending on the domain that serves as a point of reference (her domains include those of *information state*, *participation framework*, *act structure*, *exchange structure* and *idea structure*).

Gisela Redeker bases her study of DMs on a proposed model of discourse coherence and also makes reference to domains DMs might function in. Instead of Schiffrin’s five domains, however, she proposes three, namely *ideational*, *rhetorical* and *sequential*. Similarly to Schiffrin, she explains the polyfunctionality of DMs as resulting from their function in the respective domains, unlike Schiffrin, however, Redeker does not consider individual DMs functioning simultaneously in more than one domain. Furthermore, Redeker’s study of DMs combines corpus analysis (she uses a Dutch-English translation corpus) with psycholinguistic experimentation: the findings of the latter suggest that DMs function as attentional cues for the listener/reader.

In conclusion, *Approaches to Discourse Particles* is an invaluable contribution to pragmatics and discourse analysis in general and the study of DMs in particular. Fischer has brought together some of the most important authorities in the field, who, in turn, have produced a collection of papers that provide an exhaustive documentation of the present state-of-the-art in DM research. In addition, the wealth of ideas presented in the volume provide ample inspiration for further thought, to mention but one, they clearly suggest that the study of DMs might ultimately guide us to a novel conception of how humans communicate and what language actually is.

References

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