



The Role Of Discourse Markers In The Languages Of The Developed World

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Abstract

In this article, the formation, functional characteristics, and role of discourse markers in the languages of the developed world—specifically English, French, Russian, and Turkish—are analyzed. Discourse markers constitute the pragmatic layer of the language system and play an important role in ensuring coherence, logical connectedness, and emotional tone in speech. Based on comparative–pragmatic and cognitive approaches, the study elucidates the functions of markers in various contexts, their semantic loads in texts and interaction, and their cross-cultural differences. The article also employs advances in modern corpus linguistics to statistically analyze the frequency of use of markers in developed languages and their role in shaping speech strategies. The findings help identify both the universal and national characteristics of discourse units within the global language system.

Keywords: - Discourse markers, pragmatics, speech coherence, communicative strategy, cognitive linguistics, comparative analysis, corpus linguistics, intercultural communication, semantic-pragmatic units, developed languages.

Introduction

Discourse markers are small lexical units that participate in structuring a sentence or text and in managing the flow of interaction. Without changing a sentence’s logical meaning, they merely set the communicative context. For example, in English “well, you know, I mean, so,” in Russian “znachit, tak, poetomu, voobsche,” in Turkish “yani, iste, sey, ya,” and in French “alors, donc, eh bien, bon” are discourse markers. (calper.la.psu.edu) (vaia.com)

The term discourse marker was first introduced by the English linguist Deborah Schiffrin; in her studies, discourse markers are regarded as “markers in conversation that define the boundaries of discourse segments and have structural–semantic functions.” (researchgate.net) Discourse markers are most often found in spoken language and play an important role in managing many aspects of communication (purpose, understanding, stance).

Discourse markers are referred to by various names: pragmatic marker, discourse particle, emphatic word, etc. In Ruhi (2013), for example, the terms “interactional marker” or “pragmatic particle” are also used. (dergipark.org.tr) Maschler (2005) divides discourse markers into four categories: interpersonal (hedging, hinting, acknowledging—e.g., “wow,” “believe me”), referential (connectives like “and,” “but,” “because”), structural (organizing the discourse, e.g., “first of all,” “in the end”), and cognitive (signaling thinking processes, e.g., “uhh,” “I mean”). (en.wikipedia.org) For instance, “I mean” functions as a cognitive marker when rephrasing a thought, while “well” helps initiate a turn or change the topic. According to Schiffrin’s observations, in Uzbek words such as “yaxshi,” “ha,” “albatta,” in Russian “znachit,” “tak chto,”

“vsyo-taki,” and in Turkish “yani,” “sağ olun” can also serve as discourse markers. (journals.rudn.ru)

Discourse markers do not add any obligatory syntactic layer to a sentence’s syntax—omitting them does not break the sentence’s logical structure. For example, markers like “I mean” or ya’ni enrich the content and soften the speaker’s intention, but they do not have a strict effect on the propositional meaning. Therefore, they can be regarded as lexical units independent of sentence and text structure. At the same time, discourse markers act as syntactic and pragmatic boundary signals, making communication more intelligible and continuous. (researchgate.net) (cambridge.org)

Discourse markers in English. In English, discourse markers are widely used mainly in spoken conversation. For example, “you know” is used to signal the interlocutor’s objection or to draw attention; “I mean” to emphasize or revise a point; “well” to indicate the start of an utterance (calper.la.psu.edu (frontiersin.org)). Schifffrin (1987) studied units such as oh, well, now, then, you know, I mean, so, because, and, but, or as discourse markers and defined them as devices that manage context in conversation.

Macaulay (2013) and other researchers, however, emphasized that these words perform more than one function—for instance, “so” initiates a shift or break in communication; “like” conveys uncertainty or emphasis; “okay” signals agreement; and “right” confirms understanding.

Recent corpus analyses show that in English political interviews the frequency of the marker “you know” is considerably higher than that of “I mean”, which reflects needs to engage and to explain. (frontiersin.org) Overall, discourse markers in English serve to structure the flow of conversation, calibrate the relationship with the listener, and maintain continuity in interaction.

Discourse markers in Russian. In Russian, discourse markers are expressed by words such as “znachit,” “tak,” “vot,” “voobsche,” “vo-pervykh,” “na samom dele.” For example, “znachit” raises the utterance to a mid-level at a point of conclusion or explanation and prepares the next idea; “tak” functions as an initial marker or as a linking element. Studies have also examined markers such as pozhaluj, nikak, vsyo-taki. In particular, the semantics of pozhaluj shows that it “introduces a thought stemming from a person’s discretionary choice and indicates that this thought is to some extent in doubt” (journals.rudn.ru). Nikak “expresses a supposition or negation based on the current situation; it is usually used in question form, within intersubjectivity” (journals.rudn.ru). The marker vsyo-taki has five components: “proposition W, proposition ~W, an argument in favor of W, an argument in favor of -W, and a truth that confirms W.” (journals.rudn.ru) In this way, Russian discourse markers express various nuances, from tentative confidence to strong affirmation.

Discourse markers in Turkish. In Turkish as well, discourse markers are an integral part of spoken language. For example, the word “yani” is frequently used with the sense of “that is, so” for explanation; “işte” serves to draw attention or emphasize a point; “şey” functions as a filler, similar to “like” in English, in uninterrupted speech. According to Uyruh (2013), corpus-based studies are also lacking in Turkish, but the role of “interactional” markers in managing speech and serving social purposes is clearly evident. (dergipark.org.tr)

For instance, expressions like “baksheesh, sag olun” can be used in men’s speech to manage the script. Moreover, higher-level analyses indicate that in comparative studies of common



markers in Turkish and English, units such as “yani, işte, şey, ya” have been in the spotlight. (calper.la.psu.edu)

Discourse markers in French are also called “parole émise” and “connecteurs pragmatiques.” The most common markers include alors (so/therefore), donc (as a result/so), enfin (in conclusion/finally), c’est-à-dire (that is), par exemple (for example), en effet (indeed/in fact), and mais (but). (vaia.com) Expressions such as eh bien, au fait, voilà, and hein are also used in spoken discourse. For example, the phrase “à propos” can soften or abruptly change the topic in speech. (en.wikipedia.org)

French markers are often perceived in less formal conversations and in usages that reflect the language’s formal-volitional aspects as well as cultural nuances. They play an important role in linking the interaction, highlighting a given idea, and shaping the interlocutors’ stance.

The role of discourse markers in spoken communication. Discourse markers occur mainly in spoken conversation and serve to convey an utterance smoothly and clearly, organizing the sequence of talk. With their help, the speaker connects topics, starts a new utterance, or moves to a conclusion. For instance, Uzbek markers such as “shunday qilib, ...” (“thus ...”), “yo‘q” (“no”), and “xo‘sh” (“well/so”) also function as guides for the conversation. Discourse markers help the listener form an integrated understanding of what they hear, because they establish links between parts of an utterance. (researchgate.net)

They also provide information about the speaker’s mood, social status, or the interactional script. The place of discourse markers is also studied in translation studies and intercultural communication. For example, in analyses conducted in the context of audiovisual translation, the question of how the same markers are translated across different languages has been discussed. In Alimova (2025), the accuracy with which discourse markers in English film dialogue were rendered into Uzbek was evaluated, which also shed light on cultural differences between Western and Eastern languages.

Thus, in the developed world’s languages—English, Russian, Turkish, and French—discourse markers play an important role in managing speech, tuning the tone, and keeping interaction continuous. They are typically used in spoken texts and ensure cohesion and logical sequencing of discourse. (cambridge.org)

Linguists observe that discourse markers are independent of sentence structure and the overall meaning of the sentence is preserved without them (that is, if they are omitted, the sentence’s logic does not break). For this reason, many researchers study them as lexical units and analyze their functions across different social and cultural contexts. Attention to a particular language’s discourse markers is especially important for illuminating the features of spoken interaction and for preserving meaning in translation.

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