

دراسة تداولية في علامات الخطاب في منهج اللغة الانكليزية للمرحلة المتوسطة في العراق

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**A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF DISCOURSE MARKERS
IN ENGLISH FOR IRAQ CURRICULUM**

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المستخلص

تتناول الدراسة علامات الخطاب البارزة المستعملة في منهج اللغة الانكليزية للمرحلة المتوسطة من منظور تداولي. لتحقيق هذا الهدف استعملت الدراسة (١٤) مدرسا من مدارس مختلفة كعينة للتحليل حيث كان السؤال الأبرز للمدرسين عن مدى استعمالهم لهذه الأداة (علامات الخطاب) في تطوير أداء طلبتهم خصوصا على مستوى المحادثة. تبين أن معظم المدرسين في المدارس الثانوية غير قادرين على نحو كبير من تمييز علامات الخطاب ووظائفها التداولية في تطوير مهارة التحدث لدى الطلبة. توصلت الدراسة إلى مجموعة من التوصيات التي تعزز من تطوير كفاءة المدرسين لأجل تدريب طلبتهم على نحو فعال من منظور تداولي تواصلية.

والحمد لله أولا وأخرا.

الكلمات المفتاحية : علامات الخطاب -
المنظور التداولي - منهج الدراسة المتوسطة -
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المحادثة .

Abstract

This paper aims to outline the most commonly prominent features used in determining a lexical item as a discourse marker in terms of pragmatic perspectives. In this study, 14 Iraqi teachers of English from different secondary schools which have been individually interviewed and asked about their familiarity with discourse markers and, whether they were training their students to identify them as a skill or not? The samples of conversations are randomly selected from the English for Iraq curriculum, particularly, third intermediate book. It has been shown that secondary school teachers of English have been unable to recognize discourse markers nor to know their functions in conversation. All of the 14 informants have shown their in comprehension of discourse markers. Therefore, the study has come up with certain recommendations that are supposed to solve this lack of knowledge in teaching English as a foreign language in Iraq.

Key words : Discourse

Markers , Pragmatic Perspectives ,
Iraq Curriculum , Teaching English
, Conversation..

1.Introduction

In daily conversation, interactants tend to exploit their knowledge of language to obtain the ultimate possible potential for conveying their message. To do so, speakers often use discourse markers in their everyday conversations. They are versatile tools that express pragmatic meanings.

Discourse markers are a category of expressions which include items such as well, oh, then, so, but. They have the characteristic of being grammatically optional: whether or not they are removed from the sentence, its syntactic structure remains constant. Therefore, they only mark boundaries exist between units of discourse. However, discourse markers are used to achieve such functions as carrying expressive meaning, emphasizing coherence relations in discourse, and acting as constraints on relevance (Cruse, 2006: 51).

It is viewed that Iraqi learners of English, particularly at intermediate and preparatory schools, lack the experience required for identifying and using discourse markers. They are not familiar with them, and they do not know why they are used and how?

It can be observed that the problem stems from the teachers themselves who are responsible for teaching the curriculum than from the students; teachers are not acquainted with discourse markers and hence they do not place emphasis on such skill in their syllabus .

If teachers are well-acquainted with a skill, they may teach it perfectly. Thus, this study, aims to investigate the use of discourse markers with special reference to the English for Iraq curriculum, particularly the conversational part that is found in the third intermediate book. Furthermore, it seeks to define discourse markers and give a brief account of their uses, functions so that teachers, henceforth, can make advantage of this skill. Hopefully, they will train their students to recognize the significant role of discourse markers in conversation..

2. Discourse Markers: An Overview

Schiffrin (2006: 321-2) defines discourse markers as “non-obligatory utterance initial items that function in relation to ongoing talk and text”. Discourse markers have been of great concern to many scholars in terms of both theoretical and practical point of view. They are seen as adherent to the coherence of discourse. Moreover, they work not only at linking utterances coherently, but also at clarifying ideas as well as intentions in a given discourse (ibid). In this respect, Jeon (2003:19) argues that

discourse markers that are utilized for a variety of purposes, such as for getting attention (Look), for marking boundaries or different phases in the discourse (So, Now, Anyway) and for shifting topics (Listen).

According to Frank-Job (2006), the use of discourse markers is a versatile technique in which they give the context its significance. In this case, a functional interactional group of experiences. Furthermore, she (ibid: 361) describes them literally as “open class of linguistic items that have undergone a linguistic change by ways of regular meta-communicative use”

Similarly, Stubbs (1983: 69-70) argues that discourse markers are interactional devices. They are tied to spoken language and that they are used in spoken conversations in order to conjoin ideas between speakers.

Indisputably, Stubbs’ contribution supports the notion that discourse markers create coherence in discourse. This can also be argued for by Schiffrin’s (1987: 31) definition which involves that discourse markers are “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk”. Additionally, Heeman (1997: 13-14) maintains that discourse markers are used to help the hearer make connection between the previous and the following piece of information introduced by the speaker.

It can be admitted that discourse markers, according to Heeman, function as clarifying anaphoric references. Siimilarly, Risselada and Spooren maintain this premise ;they (ibid) argue that discourse markers serve as natural language expressions which have the function to facilitate the understanding of the coherence within units of discourse and or aspects within the communicative situation.

All in all, Waltereit (2006: 64) claims that defining discourse markers is not an easy task. He believes so because discourse markers are known to be a homogeneous group of words. “They do not share morphosyntactic or other formal features that would allow for a formal definition of this word-class”. In other words, they do not belong to any certain paradigm. However, they function textually and interpersonally in language.

3. Discourse Markers: Characteristics

Discourse markers can be described according to certain features that are related to linguistics. Some of which are to be dealt with below.

3.1 Orality

Gupta (2006:249) believes that discourse markers are used only in overtly dialogic discourses. He further adds that they are rarely used in

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formal texts, and if so, they normally appear to be representations of speech. In this regard, they are used in unscripted conversations. Moreover, Gupta states that the more informal the conversation, the more they are used, likewise, Furkó (2020: 13) postulates that “the more frequently an item is used, the more likely it is that its formal-functional properties are going to change”.

On her part, Brinton (1996: 33) states that discourse markers are “predominantly a feature of oral rather than of written discourse”. She also adds that they are a result of the informality of any given oral discourse. Conversely, Furkó (ibid) argues that “stylistic criteria can also be helpful in determining discourse marker status and differentiating between discourse marker and non-discourse marker tokens”.

It is seen that discourse markers are adherent to spoken language rather than to written texts. This is, apparently, to serve the immediate situational function of speech.

3.2 Connectivity

Discourse markers possess a significant function in relating and connecting the units and parts of the stretches of spoken conversations in the way that they make the spoken discourse coherent. In this respect, Schiffrin (1987) postulates that discourse markers are those elements that connect discourse units to one another. On her part, Fraser (1987) argues that discourse markers are used to signal the relationship of the current utterance to the previous one. In the same way, Furkó describes their relationship in this regard as they “guide the hearer towards a particular interpretation of the connection between a sequence of utterances” not only that but they also “rule out unintended interpretations” (2020: 7).

3.3 Optionality

Travis (2006:189) postulates that:

Discourse markers are syntactically independent in that they are not part of the core syntactic structure of the utterances in which they occur. This means that the utterances would remain syntactically intact if they were removed. This is presented in most studies as one of the defining features of discourse markers.

According to Schiffrin, discourse markers are not obligatory devices; they are optional ones. Practically, when discourse markers are omitted, they leave the sentence structure or semantic effect of it intact (1987: 32). This notion also argued by Furkó's (2020: 7) claim that discourse markers are so for two reasons: firstly, removing a discourse marker does

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not change the grammaticality of its host sentence, and secondly, omitting a discourse marker does not affect the availability of the relationship it signals to the hearer.

3.4 Multifunctionality

It has been noted that discourse markers can accomplish different roles in conversation to actualize the intended meanings, such roles may include a plethora of functions as hedging and politeness functions. Moreover, Furkó further adds that they can also be used as openers, turn-taking devices, backchannels, hesitational devices, markers of topic shift in conversational exchanges(2020: 8-9).

3.5 Initiality

Schiffrin (ibid: 328) states that initiality is one of the conditions through which an expression can be determined as a discourse marker or not. Schoroup (1999:233) enhances this idea stating that “although initiality is rarely considered critical for DMs status..., most items are considered as DMs are at least possible in initial position, and many occur there predominantly”. Fraser (1990:389), in this respect, argues that the typical position that discourse markers occupy is the initial one. Although they can rarely occur utterance-internal, and utterance-final positions as well (ibid).

Schiffrin (1987: 328) offers ‘tentative suggestions’ to summarize the specific conditions that allow an expression to be used as a discourse marker:

- a) It has to be syntactically detachable from a sentence.
- b) It has to be commonly used in initial position of an utterance.
- c) It has to have a range of prosodic contours e.g. tonic stress and followed by a pause, phonological reduction.
- d) 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.

4. Methodology

The current study attempts to investigate the features of discourse markers that are proposed by Frank-Job’s model (2006). This is to be carried out via the analysis of the data provided in the present study. Apparently, Frank-Job (ibid: 360-72) seeks to highlight the notion that discourse markers belong to pragmatics. In this case, they are pragmatic

devices more than being attributed to any other field of study in linguistics; they function interactionally in a given discourse.

Additionally, Frank-Job maintains that discourse markers are those lexical items which are derived from the many variant classes of words. Such lexical items are normally exercised to express speaker's attitude away from that of the semantics or grammar of the language (ibid).

The data in this study is analyzed in accordance with such certain features as Frequency, Phonetic Reduction, Syntactic Isolation, Co-Occurrence in Contiguity, and Deleting Test. And that they all contribute to the formation of an expression into a discourse marker. Namely, a lexical given item in context changes its lexical meaning as to be compatible with a pragmatic, discourse interactional meaning.

4.1 Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

The data used in this study are elicited from the conversations set in the curriculum that is designed by Garnet Education to suit the communicative needs of the Iraqi students, particularly third intermediate students.

The following subsections will give a brief account on the features and uses of discourse markers with special reference to Frank-Job's model (2006).

4.1.1 Frequency

For Frank-Job (ibid: 361-3), this feature is the most vital among others in the sense that it indicates how a particular word or expression is used frequently and repeatedly in everyday conversation. Additionally, it is the frequent use and repetition that makes a word or an expression become a discourse marker.

Moreover, the frequent use of an expression in spoken conversation might cause that expression to be detached from its propositional content; it can be, as a result, either of a lexical meaning (not of any concern in this study) or that of pragmatic one in which it reflects the speaker's personal attitudes, and thus it is a discourse marker as in the following conversation:

Salwa: I'm waiting *in a queue*.

Mum: *In a queue?* Do you know the time? It's five past one – almost ten past one. What are you queuing for?

On the one hand, by saying 'in a queue', Salwa is telling her mom that she is queuing, she is conveying a piece of information. On the other hand, the mum surprisingly repeats the same expression as a response,

having a multifunctional role as a turn taking device and as attitudinal device in that conversation.

It is obvious that when Salwa utters this expression, it has its own lexical meaning that goes with other items in the utterance. In this case, it completes the meaning of Salwa's statement. And thus, it is semantically and syntactically functioned in Salwa's utterance: that is, it cannot be omitted without resulting in a vague meaning. However, when the mum uses it, its meaning and function are now completely different in which its propositional meaning is lost and it is given a pragmatic one, expressing the mum's astonishment towards her daughter. Additionally, it can be omitted without changing the meaning. Therefore, it is an optional rather than obligatory expression in the sentence.

It should be noted that the expression 'in a queue' is used with different intonation contour: the falling intonation by Salwa and the rising intonation by the mum. The latter does so to seek an explanation from Salwa. Moreover, the one used by the mum is a discourse marker because it meets the characteristics adopted in this study.

Considering the following extract, one can see that both of the characters have used the same expression and yet with different intended meanings:

Mithaq: Mm. I suppose *they are useful*.

Mushtaq: *They're very useful*. If we didn't have any spiders, we'd have more mosquitoes.

It sounded that Mithaq ironically saying 'they are useful'. Seemingly, he is not convinced of the idea that spiders are useful at all, whereas Mushtaq says it seriously. The latter does so to convince his partner of the notion that mosquitoes are useful rather than of how the former thinks about them. The speaker functioned here pragmatically, Mushtaq uses them to connect the preceding utterance with the following as well as to rule out the unintended interpretation, and then he offers his own explanation to prove his claim. This expression by Mushtaq could be deleted without affecting the syntactic structure nor the semantic meaning of his utterance. Hence, it is a discourse marker. Another example may serve the explanation here:

Jassim: I'm *in the restaurant*. I'm having a burger.

Mum: *In the restaurant?* But it's five past one! Where's Fahad? Is he with you?

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Apparently, Jassim, by saying 'in the restaurant', is giving an explanation to his conversation partner's inquiry. His mum, on her part, repeats the exact expression already used by Jassim locating himself, but with different intonation contour, expressing feeling and attitude. For that reason, the expression has acquired a pragmatic meaning instead of propositional one.

This is also to argue for Frank-Job's claim that in conversation, frequency and repetition of the same lexical items of an expression can be pragmaticalized. Hence, these repeated lexical items are then associated with the speaker's intended meaning rather than with their grammatical or lexical meanings. For instance, Jassim uses in the restaurant to inform the addressee about his location whereas the same expression used by his partner to indicate astonishment.

4.1.2 Phonetic Reduction

Unlike lexical and grammatical items, discourse markers tend to be phonetically reduced in conversation. Strictly speaking, lexical and grammatical items are uttered in their complete forms even if they are frequently repeated whereas discourse markers are shortened (ibid: 364). This can be illustrated in the following extracts.

Boy1: Well, he's tall with *green eyes*.

Boy2: Ah, *green eyes*, that's unusual.

Phonetically, it can be observed that the expression 'green eyes' that are used by boy1 pronounced differently from that used by boy2. Such difference in uttering the same expression is because boy1 uses it to fill the grammatical meaning and hence should be pronounced without any reduction. While boy2 reduces it in pronunciation for he uses it as a discourse marker to indicate his pragmatic function; to coherently relate the two utterances and also to show his astonishment. Therefore, it can be phonetically distinguished. To give more situations, there is another extract to be considered.

Mithaq: Oh yes, I would!

Mushtaq: No, you wouldn't. They eat mosquitoes, *you know* – and flies.

As a discourse marker, the expression 'you know' is phonetically shortened. In such a case, 'you know' has no lexical meaning nor grammatical one; it can be omitted with no semantic nor syntactic effect. In this conversation, Mushtaq uses 'you know' pragmatically to engage his listener's attention to the mutual knowledge. Therefore, it is used to

“mark transitions in information state”, that is to refer to the knowledge shared with the hearer (Schiffrin,1987:269).

4.1.3 Syntactic Isolation

According to Frank-Job (2006: 364-5) discourse markers are not of the basic components that form the syntactic construction of any given utterances. And hence, they are not related to the grammar of the language. However, they are associated with the context in which they occur verbally, for example:

Mithaq: What’s the matter?

Mushtaq: *Look!* There’s a spider on my book.

Considering Mushtaq’s response to Mithaq, one can find that ‘look’ is syntactically isolated: that is to say, this discourse marker can be omitted without altering the syntactic structure of Mushtaq’s response, not only that, it can be grammatically and semantically understood. Therefore, discourse markers do not play any grammatical and lexical role in the interpretation of utterances. Yet, they stress the pragmatic side that the speaker intends to convey. As a discourse marker, ‘look’ is used by Mushtaq to draw Mithaq’s attention to the integral part of his message in conversation. Consider the following extract.

Boy1: It’s a horror film.

Boy2: What’s it about, *anyway?*

It can be obviously noted that the use of ‘anyway’ by boy2 is intentionally conducted to perform pragmatic function in informing the addressee that the former is not interested in such kind of conversation. And, it is meant to show the speaker’s carelessness towards the preceding utterance. Syntactically, this discourse marker has no role in the grammatical construction of the utterance and deleting it results in no change in the grammatical construction nor in its truth-condition.

4.1.4 Co-Occurrence in Contiguity

Mostly, this type of discourse markers reveals the case of the speaker in how they feel and also reflects their attitudinal interaction, such case as being astonished, uncomfortable, surprised.

When discourse markers are clustered in sequence in the same utterance, they lose their lexical meanings and they obtain pragmatic ones instead. However, the last discourse marker in the sequence maintains its lexical meaning (ibid). This can be seen as in:

Ibrahim: Oh, hi Mum. I’m in the lift. I’m just coming to the ground floor now.

Mum: *Oh, well* hurry up, *then!* *And* what about Salwa? What's she doing?

The mum's response contains multiple discourse markers in sequence; they do not express any lexical or grammatical meanings. However, they are salient indications to pragmatically manifest the speaker's status. They may reveal her astonishment, state of emotion, surprise. The writer tends to say that discourse markers in co-occurrence in contiguity might not always be intended to be used, but they intuitively impose themselves, as it were.

4.1.5 Deleting Test

Within this characteristic of discourse markers, the idea is that discourse markers can be omitted from any given utterance, and that they, do not change the semantic meaning nor the syntactic structure. Therefore, they only add pragmatic meaning to the utterance they are attached to within the context (ibid).

Brinton (1996:35-6) argues that the grammaticality of the discourse remains acceptable even when the discourse markers are removed. As a result, the discourse might be sounded "awkward, unnatural, impolite, disjoint, unfriendly, or dogmatic" in its communicative context. Consider the following extract.

Man1: I went to London in the holidays.

Man2: *Wow!* Did you enjoy the sightseeing?

In this conversation, man1 tells man2 about spending his holidays, the latter starts his turn with the discourse marker wow which is pragmatically used to reflect the man's admiration to spend the holidays in London. Though this discourse marker communicates some pragmatic meaning, it can possibly be omitted without changing the semantic meaning and the syntactic structure of the sentence to which it attached. In this case, deleting wow from the previous sentence of man2 does not make any difference in its surface meaning.

Man1: I went to London in the holidays.

Man2: Did you enjoy the sightseeing?

As far as the conversation part is concerned, the study has shown that the English for Iraq curriculum, particularly third intermediate book is well organized to serve this crucial skill of communication. The discourse markers been investigated are of all types and they are used to serve the multifunctionality of discourse markers in English.

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Furthermore, they all meet with the adopted characteristics of English discourse markers.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results and discussions of the present study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The researcher totally agrees with Lenk (1998:249) in which the latter believes that discourse markers are restricted to spoken language. They have several pragmatic functions and they are essential devices in interaction for they serve salient interpersonal purposes used in spoken conversations.
2. Discourse markers are not specific set of words to be handled, and hence, learners of English should be familiar with their characteristics and features so that they would be explicitly learned. The present writer would like to recommend reading the characteristics and features included in this study for they are brief and comprehensive.
3. Discourse markers are widely used in spoken language and they have an integral part in communication, specifically, in conveying pragmatic meanings. Therefore, mastering them is a must for secondary school teachers so that they can train their students in this regard.
4. It has been revealed that SECONDARY school teachers are not acquainted with discourse markers, therefore, they are recommended to read such books as Discourse Markers: Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics by Schiffirin (1987), Approaches to Discourse Particles: Studies in Pragmatics by Fischer (2006) and Discourse markers and beyond by Furkó (2020).
5. From the very outset, secondary school students should be trained to use them in frequent conversation, taking into account the module of conversation provided with their curriculum. It is also provided with audio as well as transcript to help them understand it better.

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