

DISCOURSE MARKERS AS INTERACTION-MANAGEMENT DEVICES IN ENGLISH FICTIONAL DIALOGUE

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Abstract. *This paper reviews discourse markers as interaction-management devices in English fictional dialogue, in relation to discourse markers used in this context. Using pragmatic and discourse-analytic frameworks, this study considers the ways in which markers help to organize turns, manage speaker–listener encounters, and enforce coherence in fictional conversation in terms of both Deborah Schiffrin's and Bruce Fraser's paradigms. As evidenced by the analysis, discourse markers are pivotal in portraying natural spoken interaction in literary texts.*

Key words: *Discourse, discourse markers, pragmatic marker, spoken discourse.*

1. Introduction

Discourse markers are a regular feature of spoken language and have drawn a significant amount of discussion in the field of pragmatics and discourse analysis. In the context of authors dealing with rhetoric written entirely in spoken form, discourse markers can give the impression of natural language and aid in character interaction management in writing dialogue. Well, so, and now are three of the most frequently identified markers in English dialogue. They do not offer propositional meaning; rather, they act at the level of discourse, directing meaning and signaling speaker stance. This paper examines how discourse markers are part of interaction-management devices in fictional dialogue in English.

The notion of discourse markers has been introduced by some scholars. Schiffrin defines discourse markers as elements that bracket units of talk and act as intermediaries between them. In spoken discourse she highlights their interactional role. Conversely, Fraser considers discourse markers pragmatic markers that mark relationships between segments of discourse. Despite the differences in the theoretical background, the two methods concur that discourse markers aid understanding rather than encoding semantic meanings.

Interaction management is the process of how speakers take turns, negotiate meaning, and keep social relations active. In fictional conversation, discourse markers help characters respond appropriately, hint at indecision, introduce new subjects, or make possible differences of opinion with less bitterness. The markers such as these are especially effective at managing these interactional processes.

The discourse marker well is one of the most studied pragmatic elements in English discourse. It has only scarce propositional implications but organizes talk, controls interaction, indicates stance, and negotiates alignment among the speakers. Well is particularly important in English fictional dialogue because it supports real-world conversation authors, character psychology builders, and nuance of

interpersonal tensions.

Conversation Analysis is effectively applied to a turn-initial marker often found in dispreferred answers . Dispreferred replies are disagreements, denial, correction or socially sensitive responses. Example:

A: “Did you like the lecture the first time?” B: “Well... it was informative.” Well here indicates caution and perhaps misfit in place to a different direction.

Deborah Schiffrin describes the markers of discourse as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk.” . She analyzes well as working through multiple planes of discourse: 1. Exchange structure; 2. Action structure;

3. Ideational structure; 4. Participation framework; 5. Information state.

Schiffrin argues that well usually appears when the speaker’s response doesn’t fully comply with the expectations set up from prior utterance. It marks the disparity between question and answer, assumption and correction, expectation and the real. For example: “Well, honestly, I don’t think that is true.” Well here indicates that the expected subsequent action either changes or disrupts the original assumption. It acts as an interaction-management tool that mediates alignment between delegates. Most importantly, Schiffrin notes, well does not simply indicate contrast but organizes social interaction and discourse coherence at the same time.

Fraser defines discourse markers as a sub-form of pragmatic markers that indicate not only the content of the utterance, but also the relationship between the utterance and previous discourse . Well signals to one that the next section will not be a continuation (or implied continuation) of the preceding segment, Fraser argues. It may indicate: Qualification; Correction; Contrast; Partial disagreement.

But Fraser doesn't do very well with the operating across multiple discourse planes. Instead, he examines how it encodes procedural data for discourse-segment relations. Unlike inferential markers like so, well does not declare an actual logical relation. Instead, it indicates that the relationship is not straightforward.

Well fulfils the following stylistic and practical uses in fictional dialogue:

- Symbolizes hesitation or indecision;
- Softens disagreement;
- Signals emotional tension;
- Manages turn transitions;
- Indicates power relations.

“Well, I hardly even know you” explains as well functions as a response preface. It signals hesitation and softens disagreement. In Conversation Analysis terms, well marks a dispreferred response, preparing the interlocutor for resistance or correction. It manages interaction by delaying direct refusal and mitigating face threat.

So is the discourse marker, one of the most common and important pragmatic devices in English. While derived from an adverb of manner and degree in the past, in modern English it serves mainly as a discourse-organizing device. So is particularly important in fictional dialogue in that it helps manage interaction, signaling inference, structuring turns, and expressing stance.

For Schiffrin, so is in its essence an inferential marker that links a new utterance with existing speech by indicating a conclusion, result, or inference. But it is more than just a logical concomitant. She characterizes four important applications for so:

1. Resultative/Inferential - shows logical consequence.
2. Summative - summarizes previous address.
3. Topic-shifting - returns to or introduces a topic.
4. Interactional - controlling and leading the turn of phrase.

These functions are also visible in the form of fictional dialogue. For example: “So, what’s your decision?” Here, so indicates that the question stems from the conversation beforehand. It points at a departure from previous model of exchange and positions the utterance as of value. Significantly, Schiffrin asserts that so deals with interaction by negotiating collective knowledge and the indication of how the speaker would like to be heard in the current conversation.

For Fraser, so mainly fits into the category of inferential discourse markers. Fraser distinguishes discourse marker so from:

- “Conjunction so” (syntactic connector)
- Degree adverb so.

Crucially, Fraser, for whom so is concerned with procedural meaning: so does not add conceptual content but tells the hearer how to read the relation between utterances. While Fraser recognizes the topic-shifting uses of so, he sees them as generalities of inferential meaning rather than interactional management.

Schiffrin and Fraser and other scholars are central to this analysis, but also other scholars contribute to understand so: Blakemore sees procedural meanings encoding inferential processing as instructive . Redeker treats so as one such coherence marker in the linking of discourse sections . Aijmer argues that spoken English with its conversational and stance marking functions . These views underpin that so has implications for how ideas are understood and responded to in interaction with others. Fictional dialogue mimics spoken interaction.

It is stated “So, you have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.” In this famous opening scene, so introduces a conclusion based on inference. It functions as an interactional bridge between observation and deduction. Pragmatically, so marks logical progression and claims epistemic authority, guiding the conversational flow.

At present, the discourse marker now occupies a unique position in use in English pragmatics, for it evolves from a mere use of a temporal adverb in early and late English into a multifunctional interaction-management tool. Although its most literal meaning denotes present time, in discourse it often loses concrete temporal construal while organizing talk, guiding transitions, justifying authority and controlling interpersonal relationships.

Now was taken by Deborah Schiffrin to be a discourse marker operating in the many planes of discourse organizing. She describes a discourse marker as ‘sequentially dependent entities which bracket units of talking. Within this model now marks a change of discourse frame. It often presents a new stage of interaction, cues a shift in topic, or shifts the listener’s focus.

Schiffrin insists that now is interactional. It organizes participation and frequently indexes authority or control. This function is critical to fictional dialogue at some of the crucial building blocks of our work: In fictional dialogue and other kinds of character construction it is vital, with teachers, mother, father, uncle and father, detective and authority figures now using now for dictating commands.

Fraser proposes that discourse-marker now signifies a change of discourse segment or a change in topic. It tells the hearer to imagine the upcoming utterance to be different from the preceding part.

In the context of Relevance Theory Diane Blakemore claims however that many discourse markers carry procedural meaning rather than conceptual meaning. From this perspective, now provides processing instructions: it signals that the cognitive background needs updating.

In fictional dialogue that mimics spoken interaction, it is used more often at the start of adjacency pairs:

“Now, listen to me.”

“Now, what do you mean?”

Now organizes sequential structure and signals that a new conversational action is being performed (directive, question, correction). In fictional conversations, this grammaticalized now often conveys position or interpersonal orientation not time.

2. Conclusion

The investigation of well, so, and now affirms that these discourse markers are largely in service of interaction-management devices rather than carriers of lexical meaning in English fictional dialogue. They organize turns, signal changes in topic, indicate the speaker attitude, and regulate dialogue flow between characters. Using Schiffrin's framework, these markers work on multiple levels of discourse structure: they serve to organize the exchange, signal transitions between actions, and shape the participation framework. For example, well tends to mitigate disagreement or signal hesitation, so introduces inference or confrontation, and now also marks a switch of discourse phase or asserts control. In Fraser's frame, these markers encode procedural meaning by tracking the relationship between segments of discourse. So typically signals an inferential relation, well usually marks a qualified or non-straightforward response, and now indicates some structural switch. Fraser cares a bit more about semantic relations while Schiffrin emphasizes their generalistic interactional function. Both perspectives are useful for showing how well, so, and now play a fundamental role in developing coherence, realism, and interpersonal dynamics in fictional dialogue. They are not just fillers - they are powerful instruments characters deploy to handle interaction with others and to construct meaning.

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