

Title: Towards an Understanding of the Spectrum of Approaches to Discourse

Particles: Introduction to the Volume¹

Running head: Introduction

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1. Aims

There are very many studies of discourse particles² on the market, and by now it is almost impossible to find one's way through this jungle of publications. For a newcomer to the field, it is furthermore often very difficult to find the bits and pieces that constitute an original model of the meanings and functions of discourse particles. Moreover, the studies available so far are hardly comparable; the approaches vary with respect to very many different aspects: the language(s) under consideration, the items taken into account, the terminology used, the functions considered, the problems focussed on, and the methodologies employed. Some kind of overview is needed that allows us to sort out the different research directions, methods, and perspectives. This collection constitutes an initial attempt to present such a path through the jungle of different approaches.

Any attempt to provide an overview of the state of the art is however in the danger of denying the breadth and heterogeneity of the research field and the complexity of the problems involved. Aiming at the impossible, the major challenge is thus how to present the spectrum of approaches to discourse particles in a single volume. The procedure taken here is to combine as many original perspectives on discourse particles as possible in order to get an idea of what is actually there and then to see

what we can learn from each different perspective. Thus, the volume comprises synchronic and diachronic, formal and informal approaches, approaches building on text-linguistic models, models of general cognitive processing or interactively relevant domains of discourse, as well as approaches concentrating on syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, or prosodic aspects. The result is a very heterogeneous collection, however, no more, rather less, heterogeneous than the research field in general, since the collection presented here can self-evidently only provide a glimpse into the field with its many valuable findings and perspectives; the field is in fact even richer.

Reflecting the state of the art in discourse particle research requires presenting the well-known scholars whose perspectives may already be under discussion, yet whose work has not yet been displayed in a comparable form, as well as less well-received approaches that provide a new, interesting look at the issues under consideration. In order to reflect the current breadth of the discussion, it is essential that no selection according to particular methodological orientations, perspectives, or data considered is taken. Thus, after a number of well-known authors had been encouraged to contribute to the volume, the initial selection was supplemented by a public call for papers.

The second challenge concerns how the spectrum of approaches can be presented in its richness and variability such that the differences and similarities between the approaches become apparent and comparable. In the current volume it was attempted to address this problem by asking the researchers from their various different linguistic backgrounds to describe their particular ways of addressing some of the most important problem areas that are involved in the description of discourse

particles. Thus, in order to make the different approaches comparable, all of the authors were asked to compose their articles according to a given schema. In this way, the strengths and weaknesses, coverage and limitations of each approach become visible and comparable. Since we are all finite, it can be expected that our models can only provide some very restricted answers as well. However, an overview of the available bits and pieces may support us in defining where we currently are and where we may want to go next. The collection should therefore provide us with a very first step towards identifying the achievements, as well as the problems, of the field.

The schema corresponds to some, in the editor's view, central, problem areas for which an account of the meanings and functions of discourse particles has to provide solutions. The idea is thus that in spite of all variation, the different theoretical perspectives on discourse particles may be made visible and comparable. The four central questions addressed, which are taken to be essential for any comprehensive approach to discourse particles, are the following:

- The first challenge consists in providing a definition of discourse particles by describing the characteristics of the items under consideration, and by developing criteria for deciding for every given particle instance whether it is a discourse particle. Additionally, the relationship between discourse particles and other word classes, such as modal and focus particles, conjunctions, adverbs and the like, needs to be explained. The problem areas the authors of this volume address in the first section of their papers are thus, for instance:
 - the distinction between discourse particles and other particles,

- the question whether discourse particles constitute a semantic, syntactic, or functional class (or no class at all),
- the status of the definition of discourse particles; for instance, whether it states necessary and sufficient conditions or whether it describes the prototype only,
- which terminology they prefer to use.

Terminological problems are very common in scientific research. In the case of discourse particles, asking the authors for their definitions may reveal initial assumptions about the field itself. If the field was homogeneous, much redundancy could be expected in the definition sections. However, besides some general linguistic properties that are mentioned by several authors, there is surprisingly little overlap in the different definitions. In case of redundancy, I would kindly ask the reader to excuse this minor drawback in favour of the advantage of being able to see the diversity and richness of the whole field displayed in this first section.

- The second problem area consists in accounting for the different interpretations of the items of the class, that is, for the functional spectrum of discourse particles. A model of the semantics/pragmatics of discourse particles has to describe precisely and exhaustively the different readings a particle may support. As for all lexical items, principles of learnability, interpretability and plausibility demand that the readings of discourse particles be discrete, and the number of possible interpretations be finite, that is, there should be a 'plausible' number of well-defined, identifiable readings. The criterion of identifiability includes that the conditions for a given particle to receive a particular interpretation should be clear. Thus, the different readings of discourse particles should be described in

connection with the different structural contexts in which they occur. To

summarize, the problems the authors address in section 2 include the following:

- the many different functional interpretations discourse particles may support,
 - the different communicative purposes they may serve,
 - the context-sensitivity of their meanings,
 - their ‘homonyms’ in other word classes,
 - the relationship between functional interpretation and syntactic position.
- Another major challenge consists in accounting for the relationship between the different readings and the relationship between the readings and the particle lexeme. Just listing the different interpretations treats the items under consideration as homonymous, such an approach does not account for our intuition of the relatedness of these meanings, and it leaves unexplained how the interpretations observable are learnable and how contextual occurrences are interpretable. Moreover, the relationship between each particle lexeme and its interpretations has to be described in order to explain why just this particle can get just these particular interpretations and not others. Consequently, in their third sections the authors were asked to present their solutions to questions such as:
- how to account for the relationship between the different readings,
 - how to account for the relationship between the different readings and the context,
 - how to account for the relationship between the readings and the particle morpheme,

- how to account for the relationship between the different readings in the different word classes,
 - how to account for the relationship between functional interpretation and syntactic position.
- The fourth problem area involved in the description of discourse particles consists in relating the study of discourse particles to other questions of general linguistic interest, such as the semantics/pragmatics interface, the nature and levels of discourse, or communicative functions. General linguistic distinctions should be mirrored in the architecture of the model, so that particles may finally lose their exceptional status (cf. Wilkins, 1992). In addition, the model should be built on those categories that can be shown to be general categories of the communicative situation to which speakers attend, and the properties of discourse particles, word class definitions, etc. should follow as natural results of the interaction of the components of the model. Furthermore, the model developed should allow the comparison of the individual aspects of the model between languages.

These four problem areas constitute the schema on the basis of which the articles in this volume were organized. This procedure is intended to enhance the comparability of the different approaches for the prospective reader and to support her in identifying the characteristics and individual and original solutions of each approach. The authors were furthermore asked to describe briefly their approaches, what their methods and data consist of, and what they consider to be the most pressing problems at the beginning of their chapters, so that each approach can be located within the spectrum of current approaches to discourse particles.

This presentation of approaches constitutes a first step towards the understanding of the variability of the spectrum of possible perspectives on the analysis of discourse particles. Presenting some of the approaches to discourse particles on the linguistic market in this comparable way may help us understand the heterogeneity of the field and to identify those parameters in which the various approaches differ, as well as the common assumptions. Further research will have to show in how far the volume can contribute to structuring the field of discourse particle research in general. An initial attempt to systematise the spectrum of approaches on the basis of the results of this volume is presented in sections 3 and 4.

2. Results from the Discussion

Besides presenting their approaches to discourse particles, the authors of this volume have been engaged in a lively discussion via e-mail with basically two objectives:

The first question was whether we can all agree on some terminology. As Bruce Fraser pointed out, 'we can't even talk to one another without a clarifying statement'. Thus, there was an acute problem for the authors to find a common denominator for discussion, and most of the authors write in their problem statements that they consider the terminological/definitional issues to be problematic. As a second objective, the problem of the units to which discourse particles refer, which they mark or bracket, was raised.

The discussion on terminology focussed on the two labels *discourse particle* versus *discourse marker*. However, since terminological issues always also mirror conceptual distinctions, a wide range of issues entered the discussion. The dissent

about the appropriate term to use could of course not be resolved, but the discussion has contributed to some clarification. Because both terms, *discourse particle* and *discourse marker*, are so controversial, also the term *discourse word* (from the common French label *mots de discours*) was discussed, but it was generally agreed that it was too vague to be useful.

The term *discourse particle* suggests a focus on small, uninflected words that are only loosely integrated into the sentence structure, if at all. The term *particle* is used in contrast to clitics, full words, and bound morphemes. Using the term *discourse particle* furthermore distinguishes discourse particles/markers from larger entities, such as phrasal idioms, that fulfil similar functions.

Distinguishing discourse particles from speech routines, pauses, adverbs, etc. which are functionally very similar, however, may lead us to a too narrow picture. It involves concentrating on a formally distinct class of items that may rather belong to a much larger functional continuum. Furthermore, there seem to be typological differences: what is expressed by particles in one language, may be expressed by very heavy speech formula in another. While we have to see that traditional Chinese grammar recognises discourse particles as a word class, in French we are dealing with the rather heavy size and low flexibility of multi-word units. Similarly, what some languages have modal particles for is expressed by adverbs in another. Many authors therefore argued that the class should be described entirely from a functional point of view.

The term *discourse marker* was regarded to be a purely functional term. The term was furthermore suggested to be the most wide-spread and considered to be the most

inclusive. An advantage is certainly that a functional characterisation of the class may avoid unnecessary formal limitations. After all, as argued above, many items commonly discussed as discourse particles are actually inflected, and are not small words but formulas consisting of more than one word or have evolved out of complex units (like English *I know* or *I mean* or Italian *guarda*). However, there are several open questions with respect to purely functional definitions.

First of all, many functions that discourse particles/markers can fulfil are also fulfilled by other items. For instance, conversational management functions are also fulfilled by speech formulas and non-lexicalized metalinguistic devices, such as '*au risque de me répéter*'. Stance can be expressed, among others, by modal verbs, adverbs, parenthetic clauses, or tag questions. And linking functions can also be fulfilled by conjunctions and speech formulas. We therefore have to ask whether a particular functional range can be found that can be used to identify a discourse particle/marker. It seems that the functions the items under consideration are suggested to fulfil are extremely diverse, and that the only uniting property is the fact that they can all be fulfilled by such items. The classification is thus in danger of being circular: We call discourse markers those items that fulfil discourse marking functions, and we call discourse marking functions those that are fulfilled by discourse markers.

Secondly, a purely functional classification would not allow a distinction according to the size of the unit under consideration and the degree of idiomatization or the loss of semantic meaning of the respective items. At the same time, research on discourse particles/markers usually concentrates on items that are prototypically particles, connectives, or fixed phrases like *you know* and *I mean*. That is, research may

actually be restricted to the investigation of lexicalized items with non-truthfunctional (bleached), idiomatic meanings, the prototype being particles, and may not be open to functionally similar freely constructed phrases or sentences. Other practices, like reformulations, hesitations, false starts, pauses, for instance, are, in spite of their functional similarity with the items considered, usually not taken into account. Thus, indeed particular formal decisions are usually taken, and the classification therefore does not occur on an entirely functional basis. At least lexicalization and idiomatization of the respective items are usually taken for granted. The choice of the term *discourse particle* versus *discourse marker* thus reflects in how far the decisions regarding the formal aspects of the items under discussion are made explicit.

Another problem connected to the term *discourse marker* is its unclear semiotic status. Basically three different positions can be distinguished. On the one hand, it was argued that discourse particles/markers do not *mark* anything, but that they, like every other linguistic sign as well, *create* meanings and are thus not substantially different from other lexical items. Most of the authors of the volume indeed hold that the items under consideration have an encoded meaning. The question arising then is what the nature of the meaning involved could be if they are only markers.

On the other hand, it was proposed that *marking* and *creating* meanings are not opposed to each other, but that the items under discussion may actually do both: *mark* particular meanings, in the same way as sociolinguistic variables reflect particular situations of formality, power and solidarity and the like, and *create* those meanings in being used strategically to construct such a situation. The question then is whether and how those two processes can be distinguished and whether the term

marker is appropriate since it focuses only on one of two different interpretative mechanisms.

The third position was that discourse particles/markers have a procedural or instructional meaning, and that they therefore are linguistic signs different from other lexical items. In this view, the term *discourse marker* is thus fully justified, because they indeed do no more than *guide* the interpretation of the 'real' signs.

Figure 1 visualises some of the results of the terminological discussion. The items under consideration can be defined on both the formal and the functional side. On the functional side, they are taken to fulfil discourse functions, which are understood to be a subset of pragmatic functions in general. On the formal side, we can distinguish between non-lexicalized and lexicalized items, the latter of which can be further distinguished into particles and others. Discourse particles in this typology are items that are both formally and functionally defined, while discourse markers may be both lexicalized, including particles, and non-lexicalized items that fulfil discourse functions.

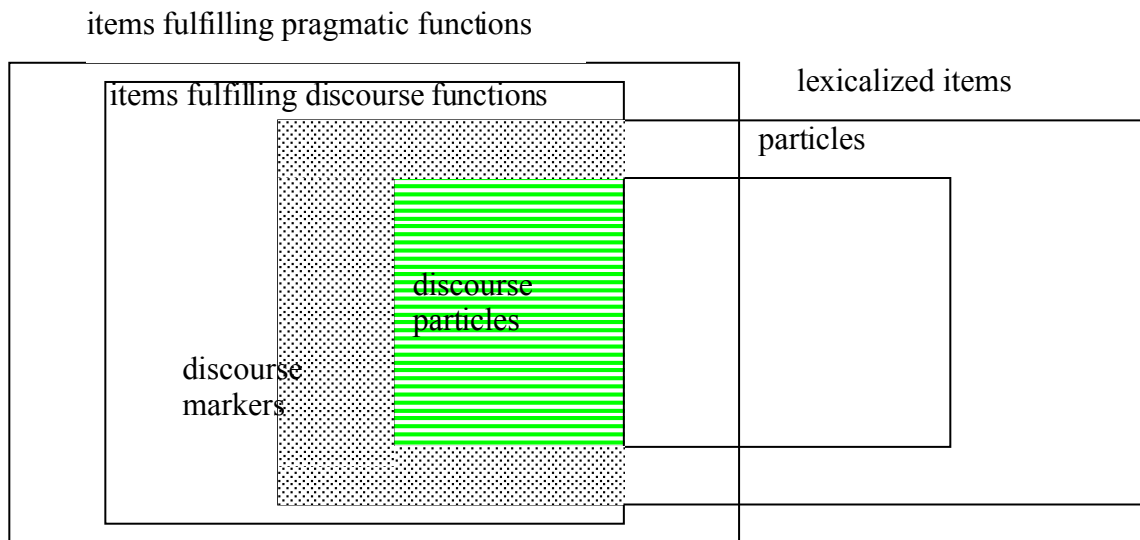


Figure 1: Discourse particles versus discourse markers

To sum up the terminology discussion, it seems that the issue is not only related to the decision of taking a semasiological or onomasiological starting point, or to taking into account formal or only functional criteria. It also seems to involve the consideration of what pragmatic meanings and the interpretative mechanisms involved are like, and thus anchors the study of discourse particles directly in the general discussion of the field.

The discussion proceeded then to the question which units discourse particles may mark or which units they connect. One problem addressed was whether these units are segments of discourse. For instance, in the sentence 'Peter came but too late,' what would the segments be? To hold that discourse particles/markers mark or create relationships between discourse segments, such as utterances, would thus exclude very many of their uses. The proposal instead was to say that discourse particles/markers connect discourse *contents* rather than *segments*, including contents not explicitly mentioned. That is, they could create or mark relationships between

actual, virtual (attributed), or presupposed utterances, as well as aspects of discourse memory.

For some authors, this definition was still too narrow. In their accounts, discourse units include speech acts, turns at talk, or the participation structure. The 'units' involved in their accounts can be paraphrased as 'aspects/planes/domains of discourse'. The problem with this approach concerns the question whether the term *unit of discourse* would be appropriate here. On the one hand it can be asked whether a discourse plane constitutes a unit of *discourse* rather than, say, a unit of the discourse *situation*. On the other hand, it is questionable whether aspects like the participation structure constitute *units* of discourse rather than their *conditions* or *circumstances*.

Finally, the question was raised whether discourse particles/markers should really be defined by the property to create or mark *relationships* between two units at all. Stance marking, for instance, does not necessarily involve relationships between units. Similarly, the concept of creating or marking a relationship would also be pushed very far in the case of interjections, hesitation markers or feedback signals, which some authors would want to include in their investigations. In contrast, other authors are content with the fact that the definition excludes such items. Thus, there is no common view on the role of the unit relating function for the definition of the category, nor on the items that may belong to it.

The results from the discussion reflect the enormous breadth of possible perspectives on discourse particles/markers and the diversity of views regarding which items should be considered, how they should be labelled, which functions they fulfil and

which units they act upon. However, the hope is that the discussion and the spectrum of different approaches presented by the authors in this volume will allow us in the long run to understand the field in its breadth a little better. I will turn to the issues last discussed now: the question of the types of items to be taken into account, the role of the relationship marking/creating function, and the types of units indexed. I would like to propose an initial systematisation on the basis of the feature of integratedness: the degree to which a discourse particle is part of a host unit. In section 4, another systematisation will be suggested on the basis of the different mechanisms proposed to account for the polyfunctionality of discourse particles.

3. Towards an Understanding of the Spectrum of Approaches

The proposal made here is that the dimension of integratedness constitutes a useful criterion to account for some of the variability of the spectrum of approaches to discourse particles. Two poles on opposite ends of this dimension can be identified: on the one hand, there are those items that constitute parts of utterances, such as connectives, on the other, there are completely unintegrated items that may constitute independent utterances, such as feedback signals or interjections.



Figure 2: Dimension of Integratedness

An example for the first kind of items from the Verbmobil appointment scheduling dialogues³ would be:

- (1) mdmr_3_06: yes, I'm free two to five on Wednesday. **so** how 'bout meeting three to five?

Focus on such items can be illustrated with a number of citations from definitions of discourse particles in this volume; for instance, Fraser speaks about "discourse segments that host them", that is, he assumes that discourse particles form parts of sentences. Lewis even speaks of "syntactic hosts", Ler addresses "utterances in which they occur", and Mosegaard Hansen describes discourse particles as "instructions to the hearer on how to integrate host utterances into a developing model of the discourse". Thus, there are a number of researchers who take discourse particles (or discourse markers) to occur integratedly into some host utterances regarding which they do particular linguistic work.

However, there are also a number of approaches that define discourse particles by means of the property of un-integratedness, that is, as items that constitute utterances themselves. Examples would be:

- (2) flmb_6_05: twenty ninth I think we can agree is horrible for both of us,
 and, **oh**, let's see, on the thirtieth, the thirtieth's pretty horrible too.

- (3) mbjr_1_12: alright, so, it's, sixteenth, one to three, that's confirmed? thanks,
nice doing business with you,
mder_1_13: **yeah**,

Proponents of this view of discourse particles are, for instance, Diewald, who speaks of grammatical unintegratedness, Schiffrin, who defines them as “syntactically detachable”, Travis, who outlines in detail how she understands discourse particles to be prosodically, syntactically, and semantically independent, Yang, to whom discourse particles are “syntactically independent”, and myself: they are “syntactically, semantically and often prosodically unintegrated”.

We can conclude that there are approaches to discourse particles that focus on items that are on the opposite ends of a dimension of integratedness. These different foci have a number of consequences. First of all, as it already emerged from the discussion reported on in section 2, very different items may be considered as discourse particles, a consequence being the heterogeneity of the class. Furthermore, focus on a particular status of integratedness influences the functional spectrum observable. Thus, approaches that focus on integrated items usually focus on the connecting function of discourse particles/markers. For instance, Pons Bordería and Rossari focus on connectives from the outset, and also Fraser, Mosegaard Hansen, Redeker, and Roulet concentrate on the connecting, coherence-establishing function.

In contrast, approaches that focus on unintegrated items mainly address the roles discourse particles may play in the management of conversation. The functions they may fulfil concern domains such as the sequential structure of the dialogue, the turn-taking system, speech management, interpersonal management, the topic structure,

and participation frameworks (see, for instance, Frank-Job, Travis, Schiffrin, and Yang).



Figure 3: Dimensions of Integratedness and Function

The dimension of integratedness thus corresponds in part to a focus on particular functional aspects. A further dimension that correlates with both the integratedness and the functional spectrum considered concerns the data taken into consideration. While approaches that focus on integrated items often also account for written text, approaches that focus on unintegrated items focus on conversation. The reason is that the more integrated an item is in its surrounding context, the more reference elements are retrievable from the context, the more easily it can occur in (de-contextualised) written discourse. Thus, approaches focusing on the connecting function of discourse particles/markers, in this volume, for instance, Fraser, Lewis, Mosegaard Hansen, Nemo, Rossari, and Roulet, also account for items occurring in written discourse. Conversely, the more the interpretation of items is dependent on aspects of the communicative situation, like speech management, the participation framework, or the turn-taking system, the less relevant they are for written communication. The approaches concentrating on these kinds of items usually restrict themselves to spoken, conversational, interaction (proponents of this approach in this volume are, for instance, Frank-Job, Schiffrin, Travis, Yang, and myself).

items integrated into
host utterances

items constituting
independent utterances

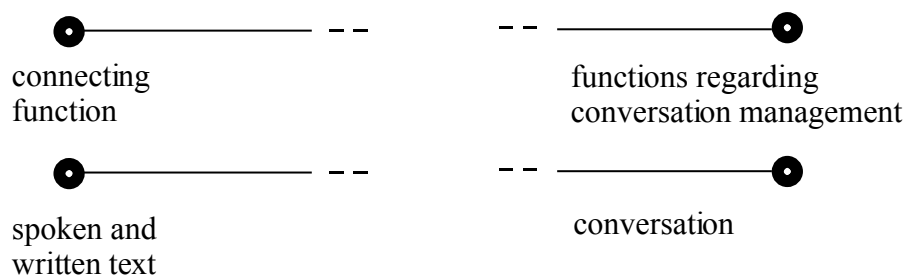


Figure 4: Dimensions of Integratedness, Function, and Data

Thus, structuring the spectrum of approaches to discourse particles according to the dimension of integratedness provides a useful basis for systematising both the different foci on the functional spectra considered in the different analyses, as well as the differences in the types of data considered in the different studies. However, the systematisation proposed so far has presented only the two opposing poles of the dimension. Many approaches in this volume do not focus on one of these poles (e.g., Bazzanella, Diewald, Frank-Job, Schiffrin, Yang) or acknowledge the whole spectrum of discourse particle uses in other ways. This is in accordance with the empirical fact that often the same phonological/orthographic form can occur in positions that vary regarding the integratedness of the item. For instance, the example below shows that *so*, a good candidate for connecting uses, as shown in example (1) above, can constitute a completely independent unit, with no host utterance identifiable:

- (4) mggd_1_13: you know, I don't even feel like thinking any more,
 /begin_laughter/ 'cause I did all that at work, /end_laughter/. so um
 anyway, you can find me at, um at work.

Similarly, in the following examples, *so*, and *um* occur in very similar contexts, the latter being a prime candidate for items fulfilling conversation management functions:

(5) mdmr_1_03: I have a meeting from two to four. **so** how 'bout Tuesday from three to four?

(6) mkps_6_06: I'll be busy the entire first week of October. <P> **um** how about the Friday? the first?

Thus, while there are these opposing poles identifiable between unintegrated items, such as *so* in example (4), which serve conversation management purposes, and connecting uses, such as *so* in (1), it may be the same items that occur in both contexts and with both functions. Correspondingly, the authors in this volume, even if they focus on only one particular type of usage, regard those uses as a “subclass of discourse markers” (Pons Bordería, Redeker, Rossari), acknowledging their other functions as well. For instance, Fraser gives a list of classes of discourse particles, among them connective particles, on which he concentrates later on. Consequently, although the authors in this volume may focus on particular uses of discourse particles, the breadth of the whole functional spectrum is generally acknowledged and can be taken to be common ground.

A fourth dimension can be correlated with our previous systematisation along the dimension of integratedness, namely the different proposals for what may constitute the host units, what exactly the discourse particle occurrences are integrated in (cf. Schiffrin, this volume). The host units specify the reference elements of the

respective discourse particle, that is, that aspect of the context or (local or larger, sequential or situational) context regarding which the respective discourse particle is doing its linguistic work.

Here, along with our previous distinctions, we can see that those approaches that focus on integrated uses with connecting functions regard different aspects of utterances as the host units. They distinguish, like, for instance, Nyan, "informational or argumentational contents, the act of utterance, speech acts, the fact that a speech act occurred, S's attitude/commitment to a view" as "aspects of host utterances" in relation to which discourse particles may fulfil their pragmatic functions. In contrast, approaches that focus on syntactically, semantically and prosodically unintegrated items may also consider host units – in the sense of domains or planes of reference. The units considered here may be constituted by, for instance, the topic structure, extra-linguistic activities, or participation frameworks (e.g. Bazzanella, Fischer, Frank-Job, Schiffrin).

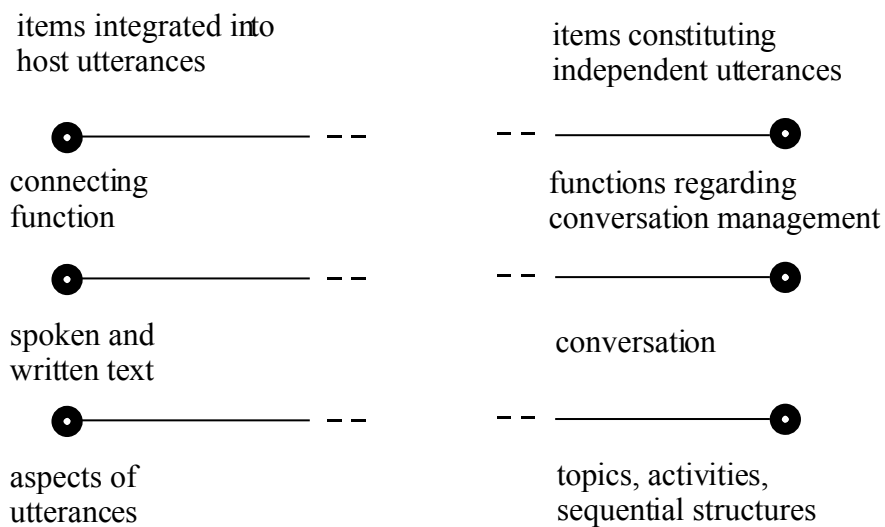


Figure 5: Dimensions of Integratedness, Function, Data, and Host Units

While the perspective discussed here so far outlines a model of the spectrum of approaches that is oriented at two opposing poles, it also hints at general mechanisms that may constitute a joint basis for all of the approaches to discourse particles. Thus, my suggestion is that the distinctions we have worked out so far can be used to find a unified view of the functional spectrum of discourse particles. In particular, irrespective of whether an item may occur integratedly in a host utterance or unintegratedly, it will point to something outside itself, either to an aspect of the host utterance, or to a contextual, situational factor (domains, discourse planes, etc.). Accordingly, it can be found in many papers that deixis is taken to be a key feature of the pragmatic functioning of discourse particles (e.g. Aijmer et al., Diewald, Fischer, Frank-Job, Schiffrin), and deixis seems to be a central mechanism involved in accounts of the polyfunctionality of discourse particles (see section 4 below). To contain deictic elements is thus one important property of discourse particles that is

recognised in one way or another in most of the approaches in this volume. So diverse the approaches to discourse particles presented in this volume thus may be, some of the variability may be accounted for by means of a model that takes into consideration the different host units associated with the different structural positions in which the items may occur.

To sum up, the systematisation according to the dimension of integratedness helps us to understand a number of dimensions of variability between the different approaches. In particular, using the dimension of integratedness we can take the first steps in a systematisation of the different approaches regarding differences with respect to:

- the items considered (e.g. predominantly connectives vs. predominantly interjections, feedback signals, hesitation and segmentation markers, etc.)
- the functions determined (e.g. connecting vs. conversation management related functions)
- the types of data considered (i.e. written text vs. conversation)
- the types of host units recognised (i.e. aspects of host utterances vs. larger host units such as topics, activities, participation frameworks).

The dimensions proposed also provide a unified look at a possibly general mechanism that may account for the whole functional spectrum of discourse particles, and that could constitute the basis for future, comprehensive models, namely the concept of reference to different host units that accounts for the different behaviour of discourse particles with respect to the four dimensions discussed. Yet,

other dimensions of structuring the spectrum of approaches in this volume are also possible (see also Nemo, this volume). The presentation of the different perspectives on discourse particles presented in this volume will provide the opportunity to shed increasingly more light on the variability of different perspectives for future research. As another example for a possible dimension of variability of the spectrum of approaches, the different proposals for how to account for the polyfunctionality of discourse particles will be discussed in the next section. That is, one of the questions addressed by the authors in this volume is the problem of how a single phonological/orthographic form can have so many different possible readings. On the basis of the question of how it addresses the problem of polyfunctionality, each approach will be briefly introduced, and a systematisation of the possible approaches to this problem will be developed.

4. Models of Polyfunctionality

Discourse particles/markers are acknowledgedly polyfunctional, and this property has been the focus of many studies. In this volume, we find a considerable spectrum of possible ways of dealing with the problem of bridging the gap between the single phonological/orthographic form and the many different possible interpretations associated with this form.

4.1 Approaches to Polyfunctionality

Approaches to the polyfunctionality of lexical items, such as discourse particles, can be ordered taking as a basis the question which meaning aspects are taken up in the lexical representation. On the one side of this dimension, there are the so-called monosemy approaches, on the other the so-called homonymy approaches.

- Monosemy: Each phonological/orthographic form is associated with a single invariant meaning. This invariant meaning may describe the common core of the occurrences of the item under consideration, its prototype or an instruction. Individual interpretations arise from general pragmatic processes and are not attributed to the item itself.
- Homonymy: There are a number of readings that are identifiable as distinct. No relationship between the different readings is assumed, and the different senses are described in numbered or unnumbered lists, sometimes associated with their conditions of usage, such as, for instance, the structural contexts in which they occur.

Thus, while monosemy approaches assume a single meaning that may be instantiated in context, homonymy approaches spell out the different interpretations, yet assume them not to be related. These two opposed ways of dealing with the problem are widely acknowledged in the literature on lexical semantics (cf. Lyons, 1977, Cruse, 2000: 109, 114). In between these two oppositely oriented poles of the spectrum, there are numerous different approaches to the fact that one orthographic/phonological form can have different interpretations. In particular, it is assumed that there are different distinct readings and that these different senses are related.

- Polysemy: A single phonological/orthographic form may be used with a number of different, recognisable, interpretations that are assumed to be related.

Sometimes, the term *polysemy* is only associated with one particular approach to the relationship between the different readings (e.g. Mosegaard Hansen, this volume), in particular, an approach that does not assume a single invariant meaning component but general relationships between distinct readings. The relationships postulated usually apply to many different independent domains (like metaphorical or metonymic relations) or are the lexicalized results of other general mechanisms, such as implicature (e.g. Waltereit, this volume).

- Polysemy in the narrow sense: A single phonological/orthographic form is associated with a number of distinct readings that are related by a set of general relationships. These readings do not necessarily share common meaning aspects.

Besides this way of accounting for the relationships between the different senses, there is a broad spectrum of models that take the monosemy approach as a starting point but that furthermore attempt to account for the different senses observable by providing models of mechanisms that relate the invariant meaning to the distinct but motivated readings. The various mechanisms include at least the following:

- Describing the invariant meaning and providing a general mechanism that allows the retrieval of the individual interpretations in context.

- Describing the invariant meaning and listing the individual readings. In this approach, the different senses of the item in use are taken to be richer and more specific in their semantic content than the core meaning component. The individual readings all contain the core components plus further specifications. The individual senses are taken to be lexicalized.
- Describing the invariant meaning and proposing additional mechanisms that contribute further, more specific, meaning components. The additional mechanisms proposed, such as syntactic/semantic constructions or prosody, are not specific to single items but are proposed to be more general.
- Describing the invariant meaning and assuming a system of pragmatic parameters that select the respective context-dependent meaning.
- Describing the invariant meaning and accounting for the observable senses by means of mapping to different domains that are part of a general model of discourse. In these models, the domains referred to provide the specifications of the invariant meaning component. Since the domains provide accounts of the observable senses, much attention is devoted to their description in these models.
- Describing the invariant meaning, mapping it onto different domains, and constraining the possible meanings and their combinations furthermore by providing general structural mechanisms.

To sum up, there is a broad spectrum of possible ways of accounting for the fact that a single phonological/orthographic form can have different interpretations. Models vary particularly regarding two aspects: On the one hand, they differ regarding whether the different interpretations are assumed to be related and what the relations

between the different interpretations are attributed to (e.g. common meaning components, general conceptual or rhetorical relations, domains of reference, etc.). On the other, approaches vary regarding the inclusion of contextual factors, such as syntactic-semantic constructions or prosody. The uniqueness of each approach results from their original combinations of solutions to these problems.

4.2. The Approaches to the Polyfunctionality of Discourse Particles in this Volume

The approaches to the polyfunctionality of discourse particles combined in this volume reflect the complex picture of possible ways of dealing with the problem in general.⁴ Some models have not been developed particularly for the description of discourse particles, and others have been used for the description of the polysemy of other linguistic material as well.

None of the authors in this volume defends a homonymy approach. That is, there seems to be general agreement on the relatedness of the different interpretations of a single phonological/orthographic form, often even across word class boundaries (e.g. Diewald, Fischer, Nemo, Weydt). The approaches in this volume can be distinguished into those that assume a number of distinct meanings that are related by general relationships (polysemy in the narrow sense), and those that assume a common core component that accounts for the relatedness of the individual interpretations (monosemy). This latter category can then be distinguished further.

First of all, representatives of the polysemy approach in the narrow sense are Mosegaard Hansen, Lewis, and Waltereit. Interestingly, all three defendants of the polysemy approach combine a diachronic view with the synchronic perspective:

- Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen proposes an approach to discourse markers, illustrated with the French discourse marker *toujours*, in which no core semantic meaning is assumed to connect the different readings of an item. Instead, the different senses are related by metaphoric or metonymic extension. Defining discourse marker meanings in networks such as radial categories or family resemblances has in her view the advantage of accounting for both the relatedness of the meanings and for the possibility of semantic change. Her model is thus designed to allow a particularly dynamic perspective on discourse marker meanings.
- Diana Lewis defines discourse markers as form-function mappings, combining the semantics of discourse-relational predications, including speaker-attitudinal, relational meaning, with certain types of linguistic realisations that are syntactically dependent on their host (thus excluding interjections). The functional spectrum of discourse particles in her view comprises rhetorical management, information structuring, and thematic organisation. She also defends a polysemy approach to discourse particles (in the narrow sense) which she supports with diachronic analyses, thus presenting the synchronic state of polysemy as a result of diachronic developments.

- Richard WALTEREIT takes a diachronic perspective to explain the functional variability of discourse markers as well. By asking what turns a linguistic item into a discourse marker, he isolates rhetorical strategies by means of which speakers manipulate the structure of the discourse or the interaction. In this way, he explains the development of both new distributional contexts and new functions. The functional spectrum observable is in his account a result of the coexistence of uses developed in different diachronic stages in order to fulfil particular communicative needs.

Similarly, Pons Bordería holds that a polysemy approach in which the individual meanings are related by means of family resemblances would account best for his functional approach. However, in contrast to the other authors, he argues that it is just far too early to propose models of polyfunctionality:

- Salvador Pons Bordería defines discourse markedness as a hyperonym of three different functions: interactive, modal, and connective. He illustrates these functions, drawing on a wide range of descriptive methods and approaches, on the discourse markers of colloquial Spanish. He argues that a model whose only purpose is to explain what discourse particles/markers are is of not much use. Instead, what is needed is a model of discourse that provides a place to locate these markers within. On the example of the definition of the units of discourse he illustrates how an investigation of discourse markers can be used to develop aspects of a theory of discourse.

Then, there are some approaches that assume a relationship between the different readings of an item but which allow this relationship to be either specified by common meaning components, or by conceptual or rhetorical links. This is particularly argued for by Aijmer, Foolen and Simon-Vandenberg, and it is implicit in Roulet's and Zeevat's papers:

- Karin Aijmer, Ad Foolen and Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg analyse mainly English discourse particles, but they are also looking at the translation of the English discourse particles into other languages, such as Swedish. Their model of the polyfunctionality of discourse particles allows both a core meaning representation of the item under consideration, as well as the description of several related senses. The core functions of discourse particles they hold to be epistemic or affective. The pragmatic interpretations of a discourse particle in their account is related to the indexicality of discourse particles and the heteroglossia of dialogues.
- Eddy Roulet outlines not only a model whose purpose is to explain what text relation markers (TRMs) are, but a model of discourse which provides a place to locate these markers within (cf. Pons Bordería, this volume). In his view, accounting for the different functions TRMs can fulfil means providing a model of text units, text relations, and the role of TRMs therein. The TRMs themselves are considered to indicate illocutionary or interactive relations between a text constituent and information stored in discourse memory and to provide instructions for the reader/hearer to facilitate access to the relevant information. The different readings of each TRM are conceptualized as distinct but related.

- Henk Zeevat defines discourse particles as context markers, relating the current sentence to aspects of common ground. He develops a formal semantic and pragmatic account for a number of English, Dutch, and German particles that have previously been discussed in connection with presupposition. In Zeevat's model, polysemy arises if a discourse particle marks two different relations to the context. The broader framework for his model could be a theory of speech act marking.

The other approaches in this volume generally assume a single meaning for each phonological/orthographic form, that is, they take a monosemy approach. First of all, we find approaches in which general mechanisms account for the polyfunctionality of monosemous items. Ler employs the relevance theoretic framework, whereas Nyan uses the argumentation theory approach:

- Ler Soon Lay Vivien takes a relevance theoretic approach to discourse particles, investigating clause-final discourse particles in Singapore Colloquial English. The polyfunctionality of discourse particles she addresses by postulating a single instruction that is applied to different contexts. The inherent meaning of a discourse particle therefore accounts for the relatedness of the different readings, while the polyfunctionality results from the fact that each discourse particle use has to be interpreted against the background of a new context.
- Thanh Nyan's analysis of French discourse markers is based on Anscombe and Ducrot's Argumentation Theory (AT), augmented by neurolinguistic

considerations of pragmatic processing. With AT she holds discourse markers to have an instructional core meaning, and she is mainly concerned with their argumentative and cohesive functions. Taking a monosemy approach, AT possesses a conceptual apparatus susceptible of providing a general account of how the core meaning descriptions create different interpretations in context.

Fraser and Weydt then do not specify any mechanism, but they describe those factors that determine the interpretation and that may cause pragmatic effects, such as politeness:

- Bruce Fraser outlines a typology of pragmatic markers of which discourse markers constitute one subclass. Concentrating on those items that fulfil connecting functions, he attempts a systematisation of their formal and semantic properties. His model of the polyfunctionality of discourse markers comprises the core meaning description of the prototype, the interpretation and inferences of the utterances connected by the discourse marker, and linguistic and extra-linguistic context factors.
- Harald Weydt approaches the nature of the meanings and functions of particles taking the question what particles are good for as a starting point. First of all, he reports on a study (Weydt et al., 1983) that shows that particles contribute to the impression of naturalness and friendliness of a dialogue. He then develops his model of how particles come to fulfil this kind of function step by step. Defending a monosemic approach to particles, he draws a clear distinction between the encoded semantic meaning of particles, holding this to be the same

across word classes, and the individual uses, that may be listed in a dictionary.

The pragmatic function to create a harmonious, friendly atmosphere is an aspect of their usage: They show that the speaker "is aware of what B, the other, thinks and believes."

Travis goes a step further by spelling out a set of specific readings that include the core meaning component related to the lexeme:

- Catherine Travis argues that a monosemantic view does not exclude a polysemy (in the narrow sense) approach to discourse particles. By using Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Wierzbicka, 1996), she shows that a core meaning description can indicate how the different readings of a discourse particle are related, but at the same time different senses can be defined as extensions of the core meanings. She exemplifies her model on the Spanish discourse particle *bueno*, showing furthermore how structural position and intonation contour contribute to the disambiguation of the different senses.

Similar to Travis' disambiguation of discourse particle interpretations by means of contextual factors, there are a number of approaches that take structural information to function as parameters for the selection of the right interpretation, only one of which is the invariant meaning component. Whereas Gupta concentrates on the contribution of sentence types, Yang and Rossari analyse the contribution of very complex contexts:

- Anthea Fraser Gupta proposes a definition of discourse particles as a very particular word class of Singlish, Singapore Colloquial English. This word class is directly associated with the function of signaling epistemic modality, which explains the syntactically and semantically peripheral status of discourse particles. The concrete functions of discourse particle uses arise in interaction with the sentence types in which they occur. These sentence types have to be considered as functional, as much as syntactic, categories.
- Li-Chiung Yang attempts to integrate prosody in a model of the polyfunctionality of Mandarin Chinese discourse markers. In her model, the four functions of discourse markers she assumes (signaling phrase relationship, interactive relationship, as well as cognitive and emotional relationship) are signaled by discourse context, phrase position, lexical meaning and prosody (including the prosodic context) to differing degrees. Prosody, particularly duration and intonation contour, is taken to play an important part in the disambiguation of the functions of discourse markers. The author shows how different functions of particular discourse markers are correlated with particular contours and durational features across speakers and in spite of the lexical tone assigned to each marker, and most importantly, also across different markers.
- Corinne Rossari approaches the problem of the polyfunctionality of a subset of discourse markers: she takes connectives to be such items that propose restrictions for the right as well as the left context. The functional spectrum of (monosemous) connectives arises in her model due to different types of discourse configurations because of which the same operation of a particular connective

gives rise to different semantic values. Thus, different discourse configurations are responsible for the polyfunctionality of the class. Discussing the French examples *alors* and *apres tout*, she illustrates how connectives fulfil their main functions regarding the processing of information states.

Another set of approaches attributes the polyfunctionality of (monosemous) discourse particles to their reference to particular discourse domains. Among these are Schiffrin, Redeker, and Frank-Job:

- Deborah Schiffrin's model of the polyfunctionality of discourse markers includes two scenarios: on the one hand, there may be polyfunctionality on the lexical level, on the other, discourse markers *in toto* perform multiple functions. Individual discourse markers, such as *and*, for which she provides an exemplary analysis, may select from a range of possible meanings depending on the domain that serves as a point of reference. While *and* in her view has only a single meaning and a single basic function, to continue a cumulative set, what constitutes this set, what provides the textual anchor for *and*, may vary very much. In her model, discourse markers are thus characterized as indexicals, referring to different domains of discourse.
- Gisela Redeker develops a model of discourse coherence with three components: ideational, rhetorical and sequential structures, regarding which discourse markers simultaneously mark semantic, rhetorical and sequential relations respectively. The polyfunctionality of discourse markers results from their functioning in the three domains. Furthermore, Redeker demonstrates in the

analysis of transcripts of Dutch and English discourse markers, as well as in a psycholinguistic experiment, that the markers of transitions in discourse function as attentional cues for the listener/reader.

- Barbara Frank-Job argues that for an account of the polyfunctionality of (Italian) discourse markers a combination of a synchronic and a diachronic perspective is necessary. In a pragmaticalization process, originally deictic elements, indicating persons, times, or locations, may come to be used to fulfil metalinguistic functions. The synchronic polyfunctionality of these items results from their reference to three different levels of conversational structure: turn-taking system, macrostructure, and superstructure. Regarding these three levels discourse markers fulfil their functions.

Nemo takes a construction-based perspective. That is, a complex set of general form-meaning pairs, constructions that directly interact with the meaning of the respective particle morpheme, explain how the individual interpretations are created:

- François Nemo suggests an approach to the polyfunctionality (and polycategoriality) of discourse particles, which he exemplifies on English *but*. His model rests on morphemic meanings that interact with constructions, general form-meaning pairs, advocating a strict distinction between the morpheme's encoded meanings and the connective, functional or categorial interpretations it may receive when it is inserted in specific (connective or non-connective) constructions. He also argues for a distinction between an utterance-type level and a contributory level in order to account for two subclasses of discourse

particles, a large and very diverse class of utterance modifiers (illocutionary adverbs, evidentials, illocutionary particles, etc.) on the one hand and a class of contribution modifiers (discourse connectives, etc.) on the other.

Diewald and Fischer then combine invariant meaning components, constructional, i.e. grammatical, information with reference to particular domains of discourse:

- Gabriele Diewald argues that the pragmatic functions of particles are really genuine grammatical functions, indispensable for the organisation and structuring of spoken discourse. She holds that particles can be identified by their grammatical function, which is basically indexical. The apparent homonymy between the different word classes she explains by different elements indexed by the particle. At the same time, she argues for a monosemantic view of discourse particles. The abstract semantic content of a particle accounts for the relatedness of the different senses of a particle morpheme, while the reference to different domains, the application of the same semantic template to different reference elements in the sense of Sweetser (1990), explains the differences between the readings. She supports her model with current theories on the diachronic development of particles.
- Kerstin Fischer proposes a model of the polyfunctionality of discourse particles that rests upon the interaction of three components: the invariant meaning of the respective particle morpheme, constructions modelling the general structural contexts in which discourse particles may occur, and communicative background frames, models of the communicative situation at hand. She develops her model

by discussing the functions of the English discourse particle *okay* in human-to-human and in human-computer dialogues. The comparison of the two different corpora allows her to identify the background frames as speaker models of the respective communicative situations.

Finally, Bazzanella combines reference to discourse planes with parameterization:

- Carla Bazzanella distinguishes three macro-functions for discourse markers, which she exemplifies mainly on spoken Italian: interactional, metatextual, and cognitive functions. The choice of the intended reading that speaker and interlocutor/reader make in a given text is, according to her model, activated on the basis of the co-occurrence of a number of contextually and cotextually relevant variables. These variables provide a parameterization of the meaning retrieved. Semantic correspondence provides thus only one clue to the interpretation of a discourse marker in use.

To sum up, with the exception of the homonymy approach, which is not followed by any of the authors, the volume instantiates all of the approaches to the polyfunctionality of discourse particles outlined in section 4.1. The collection of approaches combined in this volume thus presents an exciting overview of a broad and varied spectrum of possible approaches to the phenomenon of the polyfunctionality of discourse particles, and it presents first steps into furthering our understanding of the spectrum of approaches to discourse particles in general.

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² Throughout the volume, both terms, *discourse particle* and *discourse marker*, as well as some other terms, are used. In this introduction, I am mainly using the term *discourse particle* for reasons outlined in my own chapter in this volume.

³ Transcription conventions: <P> = pause; = breathing; ? = rising intonation; , = level intonation; . = terminal intonation. For details on the corpus, see my paper in this volume.

⁴ The papers will be presented in the order outlined here, thus reflecting the different positions taken regarding the polyfunctionality of discourse particles/markers.