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## THE FUNCTIONAL ROLE OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN REGULATING INTERACTIONAL COHERENCE IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** Discourse markers are linguistic elements that organize spoken communication and facilitate interactional coherence between speakers. Words and expressions such as well, so, you know, actually, and however perform important pragmatic and conversational functions beyond their literal meanings. This article examines the functional role of discourse markers in spoken English, focusing on how they contribute to coherence, turn-taking, topic management, interpersonal relations, and the interpretation of meaning in interaction.

**Keywords:** Discourse markers; spoken English; interactional coherence; pragmatics; conversation analysis; spoken discourse; communication; turn-taking

### Introduction

Spoken communication is characterized by spontaneity, interaction, and continuous negotiation of meaning between speakers. Unlike written discourse, spoken language often contains interruptions, hesitations, incomplete sentences, and rapid topic changes. In order to maintain coherence and facilitate understanding, speakers rely heavily on discourse markers. These linguistic devices function as organizational signals that help listeners interpret the speaker's intentions and follow the progression of conversation. Discourse markers are commonly defined as words or phrases that connect utterances and indicate relationships between ideas, speakers, or conversational turns. Examples include well, okay, so, therefore, anyway, you know, and I mean. Although they may appear semantically weak or unnecessary at the sentence level, they play crucial pragmatic and interactional roles in spoken communication.

**Understanding Discourse Markers:** Discourse markers are linguistic units that do not primarily contribute propositional meaning but instead guide the interpretation of discourse. According to Schiffrin (1987), discourse markers operate on different planes of discourse, including ideational, actional, exchange, participation, and information states.

These markers may occur at the beginning, middle, or end of utterances. Consider the following examples:

Well, I think we should reconsider the proposal.

So, what are you planning to do next?

You know, it was actually quite difficult.

In these examples, the discourse markers do not change the factual content of the statements. Instead, they organize interaction and influence how listeners interpret the speaker's intentions.

### Functions of Discourse Markers in Spoken English:

1. **Regulating Interactional Coherence:** One of the primary functions of discourse markers is maintaining interactional coherence. In conversation, coherence refers to the logical and meaningful connection between utterances.

Speakers use discourse markers to create smooth transitions between ideas and conversational turns.

**For example:**

First, we discussed the budget. Then, we analyzed the marketing strategy.

Anyway, let's return to the main issue.

Markers such as then and anyway help listeners understand the structure and direction of discourse.

2. Managing Turn-Taking: Conversation requires coordination between speakers. Discourse markers help regulate turn-taking by signaling when a speaker wishes to begin, continue, interrupt, or conclude a turn.

Examples include:

Well, I'm not sure about that.

Okay, go ahead.

So, as I was saying...

Markers such as well and so often indicate that a speaker is preparing a response or reclaiming the conversational floor. They reduce abruptness and facilitate smoother exchanges.

3. Indicating Speaker Attitudes and Emotions: Discourse markers frequently express attitudes, emotions, or levels of certainty. They allow speakers to soften statements, show hesitation, or express agreement and disagreement politely.

**For example:**

Actually, I disagree with that opinion.

Honestly, I didn't expect such results.

Perhaps, we should try another method.

These markers contribute to interpersonal communication by helping speakers manage social relationships and politeness strategies.

Discourse Markers and Pragmatic Competence: Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. The effective use of discourse markers is an essential aspect of pragmatic competence in English.

Native speakers use discourse markers naturally and frequently, whereas second-language learners may struggle to use them appropriately. Overuse, underuse, or incorrect placement of discourse markers can affect fluency and naturalness in communication.

**Conclusion**

Discourse markers play a vital role in regulating interactional coherence in spoken English. They contribute to the organization of discourse, facilitate turn-taking, express speaker attitudes, and maintain conversational flow. Although discourse markers may appear insignificant at the grammatical level, their pragmatic functions are essential for successful communication. The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that discourse markers are indispensable elements of spoken interaction. They help speakers manage relationships, structure information, and ensure coherence in real-time communication. As a result, discourse markers should receive greater attention in linguistic research and



English language teaching, particularly in the development of pragmatic and communicative competence.

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