

Discourse Marker

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Altres idiomes: [Marcador discursivo](#)

Discourse markers are terms like *That is to say, however, in consequence*, and other linguistic items specialised in linking discourse fragments are discourse markers, and in signalling the interpretation of the discourse that is being transmitted.

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Explanation

Discourse markers include such elements as:

and, or, but, also, even, because, however, indeed, in addition, Allegedly, frankly, stupidly, cleverly, on the one hand...on the other hand, by the way, then, so, well, you see?, right?, etc.

Discourse markers form a heterogeneous functional class that include diverse grammatical categories, with a similar function. Discourse markers link textual fragments, facilitating the transition between them, and, consequently, ensuring the textual cohesion. In addition, discourse markers manifest the semantic-pragmatic relationship between the textual elements connected by them. Hence, Discourse Markers do not have a syntactic function, but a semantic-pragmatic one.

The elements connected by discourse markers are diverse. They can be phrasal elements (1), sentences (2), a group of sentences inside a paragraph (3) or, even, whole paragraphs (4). Discourse markers can, even, introduce a linguistic element which connects with an extralinguistic event (5).

(1) Hailing from Zurich, Winkler has a sensuality not normally associated with either click-click electronica or the cold lap of Switzerland, but his voice and his carefully-constructed compositions have the overtly sexual vibe of Seventies pop: **that is to say**, disco. (Katie Addleman, “No rest for the wicked”, *Metropolitan*, 01/vi/2008)

(2) Barcelona fans exited the ground accusing the referee of poor decision-making, **but**, in truth, they had few grounds for complaint as for large chunks of the match, they were outplayed by a spirited Osasuna side who shot out of the blocks from the first whistle and took the lead just four minutes into the match. (Max Bentley, “Guardiola’s gamble backfires as Barcelona suffer second league defeat”, *Metropolitan*, 13/ii/2012)

(3) Young, successful, handsome, and a sharp dresser, ‘Pep’s’ popularity transcends even the boundaries of sport (just ask your girlfriend). **But** it was his industrious and inspirational performances on the field during Johan Cruyff’s tenure in the Nineties that truly captured the imagination of *culers* everywhere, most of whom were overjoyed to witness Pep’s promotion from Barça B team coach to first team manager in the summer of 2008. (“Josep (Pep) Guardiola”,

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Metropolitan, http://www.barcelona-metropolitan.com/topics/josep_pep_guardiola)

(4) Still, it's packed to the rafters on a Wednesday night and our request for a bigger table so we can pig out is denied. Around us are families with kids, dapper old gents out for a mid-week supper, cooing couples and giggling friends, and the menu immediately makes you feel at home, if home is France. An all-French wine list features bottles from the Loire to the Languedoc, with the *vin du table* going for €14 a bottle, and the most expensive Bordeaux a not-too-terrifying €43. A map on the back of your placemat shows you exactly where everything came from and on the other side there are cuts of the steer, so you can tell your *aiguillette* from your *bavette*.

Elsewhere, the menu offers classics like the humble *salad niçoise* for €6.50, a cheese omelette for €8.50 and *moules frites* for €12. (Tara Stevens, "French Style", *Metropolitan*, February 2012)

(5) [One person is eating a little chocolat cake]

But, weren't you on a diet?

Such examples show that the main function of discourse markers is not that of integrating syntactical structures, as conjunctions do, but marking the semantic and pragmatic relationships between the textual units that they connect.

In the past, discourse markers were considered *fillers* or *expletives*, i.e., linguistic elements with not function at all. Now it has been realised that they accomplished different functions related to explicit:

- relationships among utterances or part of utterances;
- speaker's attitude towards he/she is saying;
- speaker – hearer relationships.

Questions in the study of discourse markers

The study of discourse markers has raised —and still raises— some questions that can be specify as follows:

- Are they a separated word class? And if they are, what class?

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- What elements are within this class of words?
- What is their grammatical function?
- What is their meaning?
- What are their semantic-pragmatic functions in the speech?
- Which are their prosodic characteristics?
- What is their relationship with the discursive traditions?

Characterization of discourse markers

Discourse markers have some prosodic, syntactic, semantic, textual and morphologic properties that individualised them as a functional class.

Prosody and syntax

Punctuation isolates graphically discourse markers from the rest of the text in order to mark a prosodic characteristic. Indeed, discourse markers are not prosodically integrated in the text; they do not form part of the sentence in which they appear, but affect the whole utterance. And as a result, discourse markers can occupy different positions inside the sentence: *However, we are thinking of other possibilities; We are, however, thinking of other possibilities.*

Discourse markers cannot receive specifiers or complementary adjuncts, and neither can coordinate with each other or be affected by negation.

Procedural meaning

Discourse markers have not referential meaning, but procedural. That is to say, discourse markers codify an instruction in order to guide the interpretation of the text in which they appear. Often, discourse markers add a subjective meaning which reflects the speaker's opinion.

Discourse markers as cohesive elements

Discourse markers are elements without a syntactic function. They are extrasentence linkers specialised in textual cohesion and in guiding the interpretation of utterances.

Morphology

Discourse markers are invariable linguistic units, belonging to different grammatical

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categories.

Classification of discourse markers

Discourse markers are a functional class, not a categorical class, that is to say, what they have in common is not the grammatical category they pertain to, but, the function they do. Discourse Markers can be classified into three types:

Contrastive Markers: they signal some contrast between the textual elements they link:

But, although, contrariwise, contrary to expectations, conversely, despite (that/this), however, in spite of, in comparison, in contrast, instead, nevertheless, notwithstanding, on the other hand, on the contrary, rather, still, though, whereas, yet, etc.

Elaborative Markers: they signal an elaboration or continuation of the first textual element by the second:

And, also, alternatively, besides, correspondingly, for example, for instance, futher(more), in addition, in other words, in particular, more importantly, more to the point, moreover, on that basis, otherwise, rather, similarly, etc.

Inferential Markers: they signal a contextual implication in the second textual segment by the first one.

So, after all, as a conclusion, as a result, because, consequently, for this/that reason, hence, accordingly, in this/that/any case, on this/that condition, therefore, thus, etc.

Discourse Particles: they signal the speaker's attitude in conversation, and they structure the relationships between speaker and listener. They are basically a feature of spoken language.

Well, gosh, uh, I mean, you know, in fact, frankly, actually, etc.

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Connectors and discourse markers. The fuzzy boundaries between connectors, conjunctions and discourse operators

There has been some controversy about the relationship between connectors and conjunctions. For instance, the difference between conjunctions and connectors is one of scope. Conjunctions have a sentence scope. Connectors, instead, link sentences or paragraphs. However, there is not easy to maintain this distinction. For instance, the conjunctions *and-or* can be used as a Discourse Markers:

(6) –Yesterday, Lola told me she wanted to get divorced

–¿**And** what did you say to her?

(7) Talk to her at once. **Or** you are afraid of her?

At (6), *and* signals the continuity respect the first utterance, propriety characteristic of Discourse Markers. At (7), *o* introduces an argumentative justification. Hence, conjunctions can show a discursive function which links them to Discursive Markers.

Related concepts

[Discourse coherence](#)

[Discourse particles](#)

[Relevance Theory](#)

[Semantics](#)

[Semantics-pragmatics interface](#)

[Analysis of discourse](#)

[Linguistics of text](#)

[Theory of argumentation](#)

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