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DISCOURSE MARKERS AS A MEANS OF REGULATING TURN-TAKING IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

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Annotation

This article examines the role of discourse markers as a means of regulating turn-taking in spoken English. Discourse markers such as well, so, but, actually, you know, and I mean are frequently used in everyday communication to organize speech and manage interaction between speakers. The study focuses on how these markers help speakers start, continue, interrupt, or end their turns and how they signal the intention to give or take the floor. The analysis shows that discourse markers contribute to smoother communication by helping speakers manage pauses, indicate transitions, respond to other speakers, and avoid communication difficulties. The appropriate use of discourse markers can also make spoken English more natural, coherent, and interactive. Therefore, understanding their functions is important for both linguistic research and English language teaching.

Key words

discourse markers, turn-taking, spoken English, oral communication, discourse, interaction, conversation, coherence, fluency, communicative competence.

ДИСКУРСИВНЫЕ МАРКЕРЫ КАК СРЕДСТВО РЕГУЛИРОВАНИЯ СМЕНЫ РЕПЛИК В УСТНОЙ АНГЛИЙСКОЙ РЕЧИ

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается роль дискурсивных маркеров как средства регулирования смены реплик в устной английской речи. Дискурсивные маркеры, такие как well, so, but, actually, you know и I mean,

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широко используются в повседневном общении для организации речи и регулирования взаимодействия между собеседниками. Основное внимание уделяется тому, как данные маркеры помогают говорящим начинать, продолжать, прерывать и завершать свои реплики, а также сигнализировать о намерении передать или занять очередь в разговоре. Анализ показывает, что дискурсивные маркеры способствуют более плавному общению, помогая управлять паузами, обозначать переходы между репликами и реагировать на высказывания собеседника. Правильное использование дискурсивных маркеров делает устную английскую речь более естественной, связной и интерактивной. Поэтому изучение их функций имеет важное значение как для лингвистических исследований, так и для обучения английскому языку.

Ключевые слова: дискурсивные маркеры, смена реплик, устная английская речь, устная коммуникация, дискурс, взаимодействие, разговор, связность, беглость речи, коммуникативная компетенция.

INTRODUCTION

Spoken communication is a dynamic process in which speakers continuously organize their ideas, respond to others, and manage the flow of conversation. Unlike written language, spoken English takes place in real time, which requires speakers to make quick decisions about when to start speaking, continue a turn, interrupt, or give the floor to another participant. Therefore, effective spoken communication depends not only on grammatical and lexical knowledge but also on the ability to manage interaction appropriately.

One of the important linguistic means that helps speakers organize interaction is the use of discourse markers. Discourse markers are words and expressions such as well, so, but, actually, anyway, you know, and I mean, which perform different pragmatic and conversational functions. Schiffrin explains that discourse markers help organize discourse and establish relationships between different parts of spoken communication[1]. They can indicate transitions, introduce responses, express contrast,

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clarify information, or signal changes in the direction of a conversation.

Turn-taking is another important feature of spoken interaction. It refers to the way speakers manage the distribution of speaking turns during a conversation. Speakers need to recognize when another participant has finished speaking and when it is appropriate to take the floor. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson describe turn-taking as a systematic organization of conversation in which participants coordinate their speaking turns[2]. In this process, discourse markers can function as useful signals that help speakers manage the beginning, continuation, interruption, and completion of turns.

The relationship between discourse markers and turn-taking is particularly important in spoken English because markers can signal a speaker's intention to continue speaking, respond to another person, change the topic, or give another speaker an opportunity to speak. Fraser emphasizes the pragmatic role of discourse markers in indicating relationships between parts of discourse[3]. Similarly, Müller notes that discourse markers contribute to the organization of spoken interaction and help speakers manage communication more effectively[4].

For English language learners, the appropriate use of discourse markers can be challenging. Learners may have sufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but still experience difficulties in participating naturally in conversations. A lack of awareness of turn-taking signals may lead to interruptions, long pauses, delayed responses, or difficulties in entering a conversation. For this reason, studying discourse markers can contribute to the development of learners' speaking fluency and communicative competence.

Thus, the present study focuses on discourse markers as a means of regulating turn-taking in spoken English. It examines how commonly used discourse markers function in conversational interaction and how they help speakers manage speaking

[2] Sacks H., Schegloff E. A., Jefferson G. A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. Language. - 1974. - Vol. 50, No. 4. - P. 696–735.
[3] Fraser B. What are discourse markers? Journal of Pragmatics. - 1999. - Vol. 31, No. 7. - P. 931–952.
[4] Müller S. Discourse Markers in Native and Non-native English Discourse. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. - 2005. - 260 p.

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turns. The study also considers the importance of discourse markers for developing natural, fluent, and effective spoken communication in English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the role of discourse markers in regulating turn-taking in spoken English. The research focuses on commonly used discourse markers such as well, so, but, actually, anyway, you know, and I mean, and analyzes their functions in conversational interaction. The data are collected from examples of natural spoken English, including everyday conversations, dialogues, interviews, and other authentic spoken materials. The study uses discourse analysis and conversation analysis to identify how discourse markers signal the beginning, continuation, interruption, or completion of speaking turns. Particular attention is given to how speakers use these markers to take the floor, hold their turn, respond to other speakers, change topics, and give the opportunity to another participant to speak. The collected examples are analyzed according to their context and communicative function. This methodology allows the study to demonstrate how discourse markers contribute to effective turn-taking and support natural, fluent, and interactive spoken communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of discourse markers and turn-taking has received considerable attention in discourse analysis, pragmatics, and conversation analysis. Schiffrin[5] considers discourse markers important elements that organize spoken discourse and show relationships between different parts of communication. Fraser[6] focuses on their pragmatic functions and explains that discourse markers help speakers indicate the relationship between an upcoming utterance and the previous discourse. The organization of turn-taking was systematically described by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson[7], who showed that conversational participants use different linguistic and

[5] Schiffrin D. Discourse Markers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. - 1987. - 364 p.
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interactional resources to manage speaking turns. Müller[8] also emphasizes that discourse markers play an important role in spoken interaction, helping speakers organize their speech and manage communication with others. Aijmer[9] demonstrates that discourse markers can express speakers' attitudes, intentions, and interactional meanings depending on the context. Previous research therefore shows that discourse markers are not simply unnecessary words or fillers; they perform important structural, pragmatic, and interactional functions. However, their specific role in regulating turn-taking in spoken English, particularly in helping speakers enter, maintain, interrupt, and yield turns, deserves further attention. This study therefore focuses on how discourse markers contribute to the organization of turn-taking and the overall effectiveness of spoken communication.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis of spoken English examples shows that discourse markers play an important role in regulating turn-taking and maintaining the natural flow of conversation. Speakers do not usually wait silently for another participant to finish before deciding what to say. Instead, they use different linguistic signals to show that they want to continue speaking, respond to another speaker, take the floor, interrupt politely, or give the opportunity to someone else to speak. In this process, discourse markers such as well, so, but, actually, anyway, you know, and I mean can serve as useful interactional signals. The findings support the view that discourse markers have important pragmatic and organizational functions in spoken discourse[10].

One of the most common functions identified in the analysis is starting a speaking turn. Markers such as well, so, and actually are frequently used at the beginning of a response. For example: "Well, I think we should discuss this problem first." Here, well does not add much lexical meaning to the sentence, but it gives the speaker a moment to prepare the response and signals that a new turn is beginning.

[8] Müller S. Discourse Markers in Native and Non-native English Discourse. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. - 2005. - 260 p.
[9] Aijmer K. English Discourse Particles: Evidence from a Corpus. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. - 2002. - 308 p.
[10] Halliday M. A. K., Hasan R. Cohesion in English. London: Longman. - 1976. - 374 p.

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Similarly, so can be used to introduce a response or move the conversation in a new direction. These markers make the beginning of a turn smoother and reduce the possibility of an abrupt transition between speakers.

Another important function is holding or maintaining a speaking turn. In natural conversation, speakers sometimes need additional time to formulate their ideas. Discourse markers such as well, you know, and I mean can help speakers maintain their turn while thinking about what to say next. For instance: “Well, you know, I was thinking about changing my topic because…” In this example, the markers give the speaker additional processing time and indicate that the speaker has not finished. This function is especially important in spontaneous speech because speakers cannot always plan their complete utterances in advance. Müller[11] points out that discourse markers are particularly significant in spoken interaction because they help speakers organize their speech while communicating in real time.

The analysis also shows that discourse markers can help speakers take the floor. In group conversations, several participants may want to speak, and it can be difficult to enter the conversation without interrupting. Expressions such as well, actually, and but can be used to signal that a speaker wants to contribute something. For example: “Actually, I have a different opinion about this.” The marker actually signals that the speaker is introducing information that may differ from what has previously been said. In this way, the marker helps the speaker enter the conversation and establish a new turn.

Discourse markers are also useful for interrupting or challenging another speaker in a relatively polite way. For example, but can introduce disagreement without requiring a direct or aggressive interruption: “But I think there is another problem we should consider.” In this case, but connects the new turn with the previous statement and signals a contrast. It allows the speaker to respond directly while maintaining a logical relationship with the previous contribution. Fraser[12]

[11] Müller S. Discourse Markers in Native and Non-native English Discourse. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. - 2005. - 260 p.
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explains that discourse markers can signal the relationship between an upcoming utterance and the preceding discourse, which is particularly relevant to turn-taking.

Another significant finding concerns giving up or yielding a speaking turn. Some discourse markers help speakers indicate that they have completed their point and are ready for another participant to respond. Expressions such as so, anyway, or a final use of well may signal that the speaker is moving toward the end of a contribution. For example: “So, that’s what I wanted to say. What do you think?” The phrase so helps mark the completion of the speaker’s point, while the question explicitly gives the floor to another participant. Such signals contribute to a smoother exchange between speakers.

The analysis further demonstrates the importance of discourse markers in topic management. Conversations often move from one topic to another, and speakers need to signal these changes so that listeners can follow the development of the discussion. Anyway is particularly useful for returning to an earlier topic or moving away from an unimportant point. For example: “Anyway, let’s go back to our main topic.” The marker tells the listener that the speaker is changing the direction of the conversation. This function supports the organizational role of discourse markers described by Schiffrin[13].

Clarification and reformulation are also important functions. The marker I mean is frequently used when speakers want to explain, correct, or reformulate something they have just said. For example: “The task was difficult. I mean, it was difficult for some of the students.” Here, I mean signals that the speaker is adjusting the previous statement to make the intended meaning clearer. This function can prevent misunderstanding and help maintain successful interaction.

The marker you know has a somewhat different function. It can be used to establish contact with the listener, check shared understanding, or maintain interaction. For example: “It was a difficult situation, you know, because nobody expected it.” In this case, you know creates an informal connection between the

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speaker and listener. It may also give the speaker a short moment to continue planning the utterance. Aijmer[14] notes that discourse particles can carry interactional meanings related to the speaker's attitude and relationship with the listener.

The results also indicate that discourse markers contribute to fluency and naturalness. Native speakers use discourse markers regularly in everyday conversations, and their speech may sound less natural if these interactional features are completely absent. For English learners, understanding expressions such as well, so, actually, you know, and I mean can therefore make it easier to participate in spontaneous conversations. However, the analysis suggests that learners should not simply insert discourse markers into every sentence. Excessive or inappropriate use may make speech repetitive, unnatural, or difficult to follow.

Overall, the results demonstrate that discourse markers perform both organizational and interpersonal functions in spoken English. From an organizational perspective, they help speakers structure their turns, signal transitions, manage topics, and connect their contributions with previous speech. From an interpersonal perspective, they help speakers respond politely, show attitudes, maintain contact with listeners, and manage interaction. These findings are consistent with previous research by Schiffrin, Fraser, and Müller, who emphasize the important role of discourse markers in spoken communication.

The findings have particular implications for English language teaching. Learners often study grammar and vocabulary extensively but receive less attention to the small expressions that help conversations flow naturally. As a result, they may know what they want to say but have difficulty entering a conversation, holding the floor, or responding quickly to another speaker. Teachers can address this problem by using authentic dialogues, interviews, podcasts, videos, and role-play activities. Students can identify discourse markers in these materials, discuss their functions, and then practice using them in their own conversations.

[14] Aijmer K. English Discourse Particles: Evidence from a Corpus. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. - 2002. - 308 p.

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The analysis confirms that discourse markers are not simply unnecessary words or fillers. They are important resources for managing spoken interaction. Their appropriate use helps speakers start, maintain, interrupt, and finish turns, manage topics, clarify ideas, and maintain communication with listeners. Therefore, developing learners' awareness of discourse markers can contribute to more fluent, coherent, natural, and interactive spoken English.

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CONCLUSION

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In conclusion, the present study demonstrates that discourse markers play an important role in regulating turn-taking in spoken English. Spoken communication is not simply an exchange of grammatically correct sentences; speakers also need to know how to enter a conversation, maintain their turn, respond to others, and give the floor to another speaker. Discourse markers such as well, so, but, actually, anyway, you know, and I mean help speakers manage these processes and make interaction more organized and natural.

The analysis shows that discourse markers perform several important functions in conversation. They can signal the beginning or continuation of a speaking turn, help speakers hold the floor while planning their speech, introduce disagreement or a new idea, manage topic changes, clarify previous statements, and indicate that a turn is coming to an end. In this way, discourse markers help speakers coordinate their contributions and make it easier for listeners to understand the development of the conversation. These findings are consistent with the previous studies of Schiffrin, Fraser, and Müller, who emphasize the organizational and pragmatic functions of discourse markers in spoken interaction.

The study also highlights the importance of discourse markers in English language teaching. Learners may have good grammatical and vocabulary knowledge but still experience difficulties when participating in spontaneous conversations. Lack of knowledge about turn-taking signals can result in unnatural pauses, inappropriate interruptions, or difficulties in entering and leaving a conversation. Therefore, teaching discourse markers can help learners develop greater confidence, fluency, and communicative competence.

At the same time, learners should understand that discourse markers need to be used according to the context and communicative purpose. Simply memorizing a list of markers is not enough. Students need to observe how native and proficient speakers use them in real conversations and practice using them in meaningful situations. Authentic dialogues, interviews, podcasts, videos, discussions, and role-play activities can provide effective opportunities for developing this skill.

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Overall, the study confirms that discourse markers are essential resources for managing turn-taking and maintaining successful spoken interaction. Their appropriate use helps speakers organize their turns, express relationships between ideas, manage topics, and interact more effectively with listeners. Greater attention to discourse markers in English language classrooms can therefore contribute to clearer, more fluent, natural, and interactive spoken English.

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