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FUNCTIONAL PECULIARITIES OF SOME DISCOURSE MARKERS OF ENGLISH

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У статті аналізуються значення тих дискурсивних маркерів англійської мови, що знаходяться в парадигматичних відношеннях на мовному рівні й пояснюються в тлумачних словниках як тотожні. Проте на дискурсивному рівні ці мовні одиниці виконують різні інтерактивні функції, які залежать від прагматичного контексту.

Ключові слова: дискурс, дискурсивний маркер, текст, імпліцитна пропозиція, кореляція, семантичне значення, прагматичне значення.

В статье анализируются значения тех дискурсивных маркеров английского языка, которые находятся в парадигматических отношениях на языковом уровне и трактуются в толковых словарях как тождественные. Однако на дискурсивном уровне эти языковые единицы осуществляют разные интерактивные функции, которые зависят от прагматического контекста.

Ключевые слова: дискурс, дискурсивный маркер, текст, имплицитное предложение, семантическое значение, прагматическое значение.

The article focuses on the analysis of the discourse markers that establish paradigmatic relations in language and are treated as identical in explanatory dictionaries. At the discourse level, however, they perform different interactive functions depending on the pragmatic context.

Key words: discourse, discourse marker, text, implicit proposition, semantic meaning, pragmatic meaning.

Discourse markers are fairly defined in modern linguistics as “mystery words” [1, p. 152] or “mystery particles” [3, p. 468]. Their mysterious nature can be explained by the fact that they lack referential meaning and their scope of action is hard to define, especially for non-native speakers of English, while competent native speakers do not have to seek laboriously for the contextual meaning of a word, phrase or sentence because it is obvious for them [6, p. 4]. The aim of the article is to reveal the difference between four paradigmatic sets of discourse markers treated as identical by dictionaries but demonstrating different functional peculiarities at the discourse level and consequently used in different contexts and for different pragmatic purposes. The aim of the article presupposes solving the following tasks: to establish the role of these discourse markers in natural communication, to reveal their identical and differential features, to analyze their functions in discourse. The object of investigation of the article is four paradigmatic sets of language units functioning as discourse markers in speech: at last / finally; yet / so far; no longer / no more; in fact / actually. The subject of investigation lies in revealing pragmatic, functional and discourse peculiarities of the analyzed discourse markers. The actuality of the

research is caused by the necessity of studying functional peculiarities of non-referential language units having no direct corresponding equivalents in the Ukrainian language. The research is performed by analyzing discourse fragments taken from modern fiction written by British and American authors.

English discourse markers present quite a numerous group of function words belonging to different grammatical classes. The groundwork for studying discourse markers was laid by D. Schiffrin [5]. She, in fact, introduced the notion of discourse markers and defined them as sequentially dependent elements bracketing units of talk and providing discourse cohesion [5, p. 312]. In this article discourse markers are defined by us as non-referential language units that perform not only the role of providing discourse cohesion but also serve as the speaker’s means of either introducing some implicit information or indicating the relevance of the information flow and topics shift in interaction. A topic in this case is understood as a coherent aggregate of thoughts introduced by some participant in a conversation, developed either by that participant or another or by several participants jointly, and then either explicitly closed or allowed to peter out [2, p. 674].

Our first set of discourse markers, at last and finally, are usually described in dictionaries as having identical meanings [4, p. 380] because of their evident temporal semantics. In order to disprove this statement let us consider two text fragments. In this regard, we should mention that following M. Stubbs, we understand text as any stretch of naturally occurring language in use, spoken or written, which has been produced, independently of the analyst, for some real communicative purpose [6, p. 305]. All written text fragments analyzed in this article go well with this definition.

(1) *Me, Jude and Shaz spent all day watching Princess Diana's funeral. All agreed it was like funeral of someone you know, only on somewhat grander scale, so that afterwards you feel as though you have been put through a wringer, but also as though something has been let out of you. Just so pleased that they managed to get everything right. It was all good. Beautiful and really good as if the establishment has really got the message at last, and our country can do things properly again* [8, p. 365].

In this fragment, the explicit proposition the establishment got the message at last correlates with the implicit proposition the establishment did not get the message earlier. This correlation becomes possible by means of the discourse marker at last. Thus, the main function of the analyzed language unit can be defined as introducing some implicit information (temporal change) by means of correlating explicit and implicit propositions. In addition, at last here indicates that the speaker was looking forward to this temporal change for quite a long period because everybody admired Princess Diana while it was a well-known fact the Royal Family treated her badly when she was alive. This pragmatic meaning of a long-expected temporal change is inherent in the semantic structure of at last.

(2) *Carl stepped from his private elevator, came face-to-face with Abused Imelda, cursed at the sight of her, ignored his valet, dismissed the rest of the staff, and when he was finally alone in the wonderful privacy of his bedroom, he put on his pajamas, a bathrobe, and heavy wool socks* [11, p. 194].

As is clearly seen from the given example, discourse marker finally is used here with the purpose to show that the event took place as the last in the sequence of other events or actions (underlined in the example), which are expressed in the text explicitly. Our numerous examples prove that this function is the only one of finally in interaction. Thus, finally marks intertextual relations by correlating explicit propositions and indicating the last event in the enumeration of other events mentioned before.

Therefore, at last and finally prove to have different functional characteristics. At the discourse level, they reveal different functions – language unit at last correlates explicit and implicit propositions and actualizes the pragmasemantic meaning of a long expected temporal change while finally correlates explicit propositions and indicates the last event in the succession of other events.

Language units yet and so far are also defined as identical due to their ability to indicate a temporal change with reference to the future. In this respect, however, we must note that this meaning is the only one so far can render while yet has some other meanings as well, but they are easy to trace and cause no problems for non-

native speakers of English. For example, the utterances *He is not here yet* and *He is not here so far* both introduce the implicit proposition at the textual level *He will (may) be here in the future*. Therefore, both discourse markers render the idea of a temporal change in the future. Their pragmatic peculiarities, however, are different, which is the reason for their functioning in different pragmatic contexts as is shown in examples (3) and (4):

(3) *Mississippi's reputation as a judicial hellhole, as a dumping ground for thousands of frivolous lawsuits, as a heaven for reckless trial lawyers, had changed almost overnight. Thank you, Ron Fisk.*

Many firms were beginning to see the first signs of stabilized rates for liability insurance protection. Nothing definite yet, but things looked promising. Thank you, Ron Fisk [11, p. 433].

In example (3) the proposition nothing definite yet correlates with the implicit proposition there will be something (definite) in the future. This hidden implicit information becomes evident at the discourse level by means of yet. Accordingly, the semantic content of the linguistic unit yet can be described as “temporal change in the future”. This meaning of a future change is combined with the pragmatic meaning of the speaker's certitude in this change, which is confirmed by the context (things looked promising). So far, however, reveals different functional properties. Consider example (4):

(4) *He walked past four cabins, each with at least three passengers, none of whom looked suspicious. He went to the restroom, locked the door, and waited until the train began to slow. Then it stopped. Zug was a two-minute layover, and the train so far had been ridiculously on time* [10, p. 260].

In this fragment, the utterance the train so far had been ridiculously on time correlates with the implicit proposition the train may not be on time in the future, that is, the component “temporal change in the future” is also present in the semantic structure of so far. However, in this case the speaker is not so certain that the temporal change will happen, on the contrary, he hopes that it will never happen and the train will arrive at the place of destination on time but he leaves place for some doubt, which is confirmed by using the commentary adverb ridiculously. Thus, the semantic meaning of the future change is combined with the pragmatic meaning of the speaker's uncertainty of this change.

As we have seen, discourse markers yet and so far have obvious pragmatic distinctions that depend on the speaker's estimation of the future even as highly possible or problematic. Therefore, these discourse markers have different spheres of pragmatic application. Consider the use of yet in example (5) where the pragmatic meaning of this marker makes it a perfect means of the indirect strategy of self-presentation used by the detective (Callahan) to assure the hearers that situation will definitely clear up and the possible cause of death will be inevitably found out:

(5) *“She was found dead this morning,” the detective says.*

I gasp, a loud gurgling sound I don't recognize escaping from someplace deep within.

“What do you mean?” Sam asks. “What happened?”

“We don't know yet. Her next-door neighbor came home around two p.m. and found Miss Cushing's front door open. She knocked to tell her and when there

was no answer, she went in. She found Miss Cushing lying on the floor.”

“Are you sure it’s her?”

“Her neighbor identified the body.”

“Was there an accident?” I ask. My voice sounds far away, childlike and tinny, disconnected from my body.

“We don’t know exactly what happened yet,” Callahan says [12, p. 225].

Discourse-oriented approach makes it possible to analyze another paradigmatic set of temporal discourse markers – no longer and no more. Both language units have an invariant semantic component “termination of the previous state of events” but their pragmatic peculiarities are obviously different. The choice of these markers depends on the speaker’s intention because, as our illustrative material shows, the use of any (no) more demonstrates that the speaker regards termination of the previous state as final while the use of any (no) longer presupposes that the previous state of events may be resumed in the future. In other words, the difference lies in the change character: final or temporary. Let us consider two text fragments:

(6) As soon as they were gone, Drew’s crying abated. “I don’t like them either,” Casey confided, rocking Drew back and forth until the baby’s roar dropped to a steady whimper. “That’s a good girl,” she whispered. You feel better now, don’t you? Me too. My name’s Casey. I’m your big sister, and I’ll take care of you. You won’t have to cry anymore” [9, p. 77].

By using *anymore* in example (6) the speaker (a child) is trying to calm down her kid sister by implying that the previous state of things (her sister’s crying) will never happen again because now she will take care of her. Example (7) demonstrates that the speaker admits that the change in the state of events may be temporary because the former partners, who are long-life friends, can become partners again:

(7) “They were partners?”

“Yes.”

“But they no longer work together.” The observation was part statement, part question.

“No. They went their separate ways about a year ago” [9, p. 54].

It should be noted that functioning of the analyzed discourse markers has nothing to do with the grammatical tense-form or aspect semantics of the verb (as it is often taken for granted) the meaning of which is modified by any (no) more or any (no) longer. Our corpus of examples proves the fact that the choice of the discourse marker depends on the speaker’s intention only. Consider, for instance, two fragments where both units modify the stative verb to be:

(8) And Jude had heard survey on the radio that by the turn of the millennium a third of all households will be single, therefore proving that at last we are no longer tragic freaks [7, p. 77].

(9) “Anyway, there’s no such thing as general knowledge any more,” I said indignantly [8, p. 247].

The last problematic set of discourse markers under linguistic analysis are *actually* and *in fact* – a real stumbling block for non-native speakers of English as these two units are multifunctional, besides, they are frequently used in natural discourse, especially conversational. In some of their functions, they become rather close to each other because of their implicit semantics. It can be explained by the fact that both language units possess contrastive-

concessive semantics, which becomes clear at the discourse level. We describe this meaning as “partial contradiction / correction of the communicant’s previous statement”. These markers serve in interaction as a tool for rendering the speaker’s intention to provide some additional information that he considers relevant and necessary. Consider the following example:

(10) “Do you want me to stay with her?” said Rebecca to Mark, all wide-eyed concern – as if I were a troublesome toddler. “Then you could have a good ski before dinner.” <...>

“Actually, I think I need a rest,” I said. I’ll just have a hot chocolate and recover my composure.” [8, p. 92].

The main function of *actually* here is to provide the speaker’s disagreement with the hearer’s previous statement. In the given text fragment *actually* introduces by means of correlation the following implicit information: though you want to help me by staying with me, I don’t need your help. Specific procedural concessive semantics of the analyzed discourse marker makes it a perfect means of realizing an indirect face-saving strategy of rejecting the offer of the previous speaker. Thus, *actually* is aimed at providing a contradicting viewpoint or offering polite disagreement with the communicant’s statement. It should be noted that this discourse marker is often used for this purpose by native speakers and misused by Ukrainian students of English who try to imitate native speakers but as they do not know the scope of action of this tricky language unit, their attempt to use *actually* now and then may produce a humorous effect.

As it was already mentioned, the meaning of *in fact* is semantically close to the meaning of *actually*. However, the research on functional peculiarities of these discourse markers enabled us to arrive at the conclusion that *in fact* would be more typical and appropriate for the instances when the speaker wants to correct himself (rather than the previous communicant) in order to sound more convincing. Consider the following example:

(11) He looked at me, chewing, grinning expectantly. Funnily enough the usual sniggers round the table weren’t happening. In fact the whole Thailand interlude seemed to have brought a new respect from my colleagues that I was naturally delighted by [8, p. 346].

In the analyzed conversational fragment *in fact* is used as the marker of the speaker’s correction of herself and indicates that she wants to add some more relevant information that is to some extent contrasted to the previous one. The relevance of the given information is confirmed not only by *in fact* but also by the contextually collocated nouns *sniggers* and *respect*.

It follows that *actually* and *in fact* have different interactive functions: *actually* is the marker of correcting the previous speaker’s statement while *in fact* is the marker of correcting the speaker’s own statement.

The discourse-based approach to analyzing the above paradigmatic sets of discourse markers above leads to the following conclusion: the analyzed paradigmatic sets are not identical as their interactive functions are different and depend on pragmatic factors. This specific functional feature of discourse markers should not be ignored when teaching non-native speakers of English.

The prospect of further investigation lies in providing a comparative functional analysis of concessive discourse markers.

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