

Polysemy and polyfunctionality: A two-dimensional account of discourse markers

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Discourse markers, i.e. “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk” (Schiffrin 1987: 31), are the focus of an abundant research field investigating the many aspects of their behavior, either from a syntactic, semantic, prosodic or other approach. These pragmatic expressions such as *but*, *well*, *so*, *I mean*, *however* or *you know* in English, are particularly fascinating from the perspective of their polyfunctionality, which has been explained and modeled under several different theoretical frameworks (see Fischer 2006 for an overview). These models include, among others, the notion of multidimensionality in the Dynamic Interpretation Theory (Petukhova & Bunt 2009), the five “planes of talk” in Schiffrin (1987), the concept of “meaning potentials” (Norén & Linell 2006; Aijmer 2013), the constructionist approach by Fischer (2010, 2015) or the three components of discourse structure in Redeker (1990) (see also González 2005). Each approach provides a different (yet partially overlapping) account of the many dimensions of meaning which discourse markers can express, following different theories and agendas (eg. discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, computational applications).

Combining theoretical and methodological considerations, we propose a corpus-based annotation scheme for (spoken) discourse markers, where their functional spectrum is seen as the interface between two independent dimensions, namely a domain and a function (Crible & Degand in press). Our four domains (viz. *ideational*, *rhetorical*, *sequential* and *interpersonal*) are rooted in the tradition of cognitive models of discourse structure (e.g. Redeker 1990; Sweetser 1990; Sanders 1997) and correspond to different layers of discourse which speakers (or writers) can address: content relations (ideational), subjective and metalinguistic meanings (rhetorical), discourse structure (sequential) and speaker-hearer relationship (interpersonal). Functions, on the other hand, are more specific interpretations of the type of operation which a discourse marker is performing in a given context (fifteen types, e.g. causal relation, topic-shift, turn-taking, face-saving, etc.).

Following Bunt (2011), we distinguish between “general-purpose” functions, which can activate any of the four domains (e.g. a relation of contrast can be either ideational, rhetorical, sequential or interpersonal), and “dimension-specific”, here, domain-specific functions, which pertain to one domain only (e.g. topic-shift is always sequential). We consider domains and functions as two orthogonal dimensions of meaning which each correspond to a type of semantic variation, viz. polyfunctionality and polysemy, respectively. By polyfunctionality, we mean the possibility for a single invariant meaning to be expressed across several domains (e.g. ideational vs. rhetorical contrast). Polysemy, in turn, refers to the multiple functions a discourse marker can fulfil, regardless of the domain (e.g. *so* to express a consequence, an exemplification or a topic shift). In this sense, polysemy is different from “simultaneous multifunctionality” (Bunt 2011), which rather targets the joint expression of more than one meaning at a time in a given context, be it different functions (polysemy) or the same function in different domains (polyfunctionality).

Our integrated approach is compatible with an inclusive definition of the discourse marker category as adopted and annotated by Crible (2017), especially since issues of categorization

and functional classification are strongly inter-related (cf. Degand et al. 2013). In this presentation, we present in detail the structure and content of Crible & Degand's (in press) two-dimensional taxonomy, discuss its relation to other models of the polyfunctionality of discourse markers, and illustrate how it allows us to account for their functional spectrum, with corpus-based examples of French *mais* 'but' (polyfunctionality) and *donc* 'so' (polysemy).

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