

10. Discourse Markers

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1 Introduction

The term DISCOURSE MARKER (DM) is generally used to refer to a syntactically heterogeneous class of expressions which are distinguished by their function in discourse and the kind of meaning they encode. This chapter aims to provide an overview of the issues that have arisen in the attempt to say what the function of these expressions is and how they should be accommodated in a theory of meaning. It does not, however, aim to provide a definitive list of DMs, for as Jucker (1993: 436) points out, research has not yielded a definitive list of DMs in English or any other language. Indeed, as Schourup (1999) observes, the use of this term by some writers (e.g. Blakemore 1987, 1996 and Unger 1996) is not intended to reflect a commitment to the existence of a class of DMs at all. Given this lack of agreement, it is not always possible to say that the range of alternative terms which have appeared in the growing literature in this area – for example, PRAGMATIC MARKER, DISCOURSE PARTICLE, DISCOURSE CONNECTIVE, DISCOURSE OPERATOR, CUE MARKER – are really labels for the same phenomenon.¹ At this stage, then, it is only possible to give examples of expressions which have been treated as DMs in a number of different languages. Thus English examples of DMs are *well, but, so, indeed, in other words, as a result* and *now*.²

In spite of these difficulties, it seems that we can say that the term DISCOURSE is intended to underline the fact that these expressions must be described at the level of discourse rather than the sentence, while the term MARKER is intended to reflect the fact that their meanings must be analyzed in terms of what they indicate or mark rather than what they describe. At the same time, however, it is acknowledged that DMs are not the only expressions that operate as indicators at the level of discourse: discourse adverbials like *frankly* or *reportedly* and expletives like *damn* and *good grief* are also described in these terms. The property generally considered to distinguish DMs from other discourse indicators is their function of marking relationships between units of discourse. Thus Levinson (1983) draws attention to words and phrases which not only have a “component of meaning which resists truth–conditional treatment” but also “indicate, often in very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains them is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse” (1983: 197–8). A similar characterization is given by Fraser (1990, 1996), who sees them as a subclass of the class of expressions which contribute to non–truth–conditional sentence meaning distinguished from other such expressions by their role in signaling “the relationship of the basic message to the foregoing discourse” (1996: 186).

It is these two properties that have brought DMs into the center of pragmatics research. On the one hand, their non–truth–conditionality has meant that they play a role in discussions of the non–unitary nature of linguistic meaning and the relationship between semantics and pragmatics. On the other hand, their role in signaling connectivity in discourse has meant that they play a role in the discussion of how we should account for the textual unity of discourse. Given the theoretical divides that have

emerged in the discussion of both these issues, it is not surprising that DM research has not yielded a single framework for the analysis of these expressions. The aim of this chapter is to review the main approaches that have been taken both to the question of what kind of meaning they express and the sense in which they can be said to connect units of discourse.

2 The Meaning of DMs

2.1 DMs as conventional implicatures

In this section I shall examine the role that DMs have played in the move toward a non-unitary theory of meaning. This move has not always been a move toward the same kind of distinction and, consequently, my task here is to tease these different distinctions apart and to locate DMs on the theoretical map that emerges.

For many writers, the significance of DMs lies in the role they have played in arguments for the existence of pragmatic meaning.³ Underlying this approach is the view that semantics is the study of truth-conditional meaning while pragmatics is “meaning minus truth conditions” (cf. Gazdar 1979: 2). Given this view, DMs lie on the pragmatics side of the semantics-pragmatics border in virtue of the fact that they do not contribute to the truth-conditional content of the utterance that contains them. For example, it is generally agreed that although the suggestion of contrast in (1) is due to the linguistic properties of *but*, its truth depends only on the truth of the propositions in (2) (cf. Grice 1961). Similarly, the truth of (3) depends only on the propositions in (4) and not on whether the second is a consequence of the first.

- (1) Oscar is here but he has forgotten his calculator.
- (2) a. Oscar is here.
b. Oscar has forgotten his calculator.
- (3) They don't drink wine. So I have bought some beer and lemonade.
- (4) a. They don't drink wine.
b. I have bought some beer.

Even if there is no disagreement about these facts, there is disagreement about their significance.⁴ While some writers (for example Fraser 1996) have adopted the classical view that truth-conditional semantics is a theory of sentence meaning and hence that expressions like *but* and so do not affect the truth conditions of sentences, others (for example, Carston 2000, Wilson and Sperber 1993, and Blakemore 1987, 1996, 2000) see having truth conditions as a property of mental representations rather than linguistic representations, and see the phenomena in (1) and (3) as examples of the way in which linguistic form does not contribute to the truth-conditional content of a conceptual representation. Either way, however, these expressions raise the same sort of question: If they don't contribute to truth conditions, what *do* they contribute to?

As we have already observed, DMs are not the only examples of non-truth-conditional meaning. This raises the question of whether the answer to this question is the same for all types of expressions which are said to encode non-truth-conditional meaning. Fraser (1990, 1996) has proposed that there are four different subtypes of expressions that contribute to non-truth-conditional meaning (called PRAGMATIC MARKERS): BASIC MARKERS, which indicate the force of the intended message (e.g. *please* and performatives like *I promise*); COMMENTARY MARKERS, which comment on the basic message (e.g. *frankly* and *allegedly*); PARALLEL MARKERS, which “encode an entire message ... separate and additional to the basic and/or commentary message(s)” (1990: 387) (e.g. *damn*); and DISCOURSE MARKERS (e.g. *after all*, *but* and *as a result*) which, in contrast to commentary markers, do not contribute to REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING, but only have what Fraser calls PROCEDURAL MEANING, signaling how the basic message relates to the prior discourse.

In adopting this terminology Fraser claims to be following Blakemore (1987). However, Fraser's distinction between representational and procedural meaning is not equivalent to the cognitive

distinction that has been developed in Relevance Theory (see section 2.3), since it appeals to the role that DMs play in the coherence of discourse. Not surprisingly, expressions that Fraser classifies as procedural (e.g., *as a result*) are not regarded as encoding procedural meaning in RT (Relevance Theory).

More generally, Fraser's framework for the analysis of non-truth-conditional meaning rests on the unexplained distinction between content or descriptive meaning and meaning which is signaled or indicated: an expression which functions as an indicator (or marker) does so simply on the grounds that it does not contribute to "content." As Rieber (1997) observes, Fraser is not alone in using the notion of an indicator without explaining it. It is, perhaps, odd that there is no reference in his work to Grice's (1967, 1989) notion of conventional implicature, which represents the first attempt to say something more about non-truth-conditional meaning other than the (obvious) fact that it is not truth-conditional.

According to Grice (1989), while some expressions communicate information about the CENTRAL OR GROUND-FLOOR speech act performed by an utterance, DMs like *but* or *so* communicate information about a NON-CENTRAL OR HIGHER LEVEL speech act which comments in some way on the interpretation of the central speech act.⁵ For example, in (1) the speaker performs a ground-floor statement that Oscar is here and that he has forgotten his calculator, and at the same time a non-central speech act by which he indicates that he is drawing a contrast between the two conjuncts. The function of *but* is to signal the performance of this act and hence it does not affect the truth value of the utterance. Those aspects of linguistic meaning that contribute to the content of the ground-floor statement are said to contribute to WHAT IS SAID, while those aspects of meaning which signal information about the performance of a non-central act are said to contribute to what is CONVENTIONALLY IMPLICATED.

This speech act theoretic account of conventional implicature seems to assume that each DM corresponds to a speech act individuated by its content. Thus while *but* signals the performance of an act with the content presented schematically in (5), *so* signals the performance of an act with a content of the form in (6), and *moreover* signals the performance of an act whose content has the form in (7):

- (5) There is a contrast between the statement that P and the statement that Q
- (6) The statement that P is an explanation for the statement that Q
- (7) The statement that Q is additional to the statement that P

As Wilson and Sperber (1993) have observed, Grice's characterization of the meanings of these expressions fails to account for all of their uses. Consider, for example, the discourse initial use of *so* in (8) produced by a speaker who sees someone arrive home laden with parcels.

- (8) [the hearer has arrived home laden with parcels] So you've spent all your money.

Since there is no utterance which could be understood as an explanation for the ground-floor statement made by (8), one cannot characterize the meaning of *so* in terms of its role in signaling the performance of an act whose content has the form in (6). As Blakemore (1997) observes, it is even more difficult to see how a Gricean analysis could be applied in cases where DMs are used as fragmentary utterances, for example (9) and (10) (see also Stainton, this volume).

- (9) [speaker listens patiently to an account of why the carpenters have taken a whole day to put up three shelves] Still.
- (10) [speaker and hearer are witnesses to a passionate speech followed by dramatic exit] Well.

It seems that underlying Grice's account is the assumption that corresponding to each DM there is a conceptual representation of a relation that holds between two statements. Thus *but* encodes a conceptual representation of a relation of contrasting, while *moreover* is linked to a conceptual representation of the relation of adding. It has yet to be shown in detail how the meanings of notoriously elusive DMs (*well*, for example) are analyzed along the lines given in (5–7). Moreover, it is

not clear how this sort of approach would distinguish between DMs whose meanings, although closely related, are not identical – *but*, *nevertheless* and *yet*, for example.⁶

These are questions about the content of the higher-order speech acts performed by speakers who use expressions like *but*. However, if a speaker who uses *but* is performing a speech act, then it must also have an illocutionary force, and it is not clear what this would be. It cannot be contrasting itself, since this is not a speech act, at least not in the sense made familiar by classical speech act theory (Austin 1962, Searle 1969). In any case, it seems that Grice was looking for an analysis in which the information that the speaker is drawing a contrast between emerges as a distinct proposition (a conventional implicature). His idea seems to be that this proposition is a comment on the central (ground-floor) act, and thus that the higher-order act is an act of COMMENTING. The question, then, is how do we analyze commenting?

Rieber's (1997) modification of Grice's conventional implicature analysis might seem to answer these questions. He argues that *but* is a parenthetical TACIT PERFORMATIVE and that (11) should be analyzed as (12).

(11) Sheila is rich but she is unhappy.

(12) Sheila is rich and (I suggest that this contrasts) she is unhappy.

While this analysis does, as Rieber says, "get the truth conditions right" (1997: 54), it seems to raise the same sort of questions. His analysis is illuminating only to the extent that we understand what it means to perform the speech act of suggesting. Rieber himself is doubtful whether *suggest* is the most appropriate verb. However, this is not really the point, because it is clear that what he has in mind is something like showing or indicating – which brings us back to our original problem.

According to Rieber, the role of words like *but* is explained once it is recognized that not all communication consists in modifying the beliefs of the hearer. In contrast with "ordinary communication," a speaker who is indicating or showing that something is the case is not standing behind her words, but simply inducing the hearer to notice something that he might have seen for himself (Rieber 1997: 61). In this way, using *but* is rather like pointing at an oncoming bus or opening the door of the fridge to show someone that there is no food. Pointing is, of course, a natural device rather than a linguistic one. The question is whether a linguistic expression points in this sense.

According to Rieber, by using *but* in (11) the speaker is inducing the hearer to "see" that the second segment contrasts with the first – in other words, a hearer who understands an utterance containing *but* recovers the proposition in (13):

(13) The state of affairs represented by the second segment contrasts with the state of affairs represented by the first segment.

Rieber gives no evidence that this is indeed the case. However, as we shall see in section 2.3, it is not clear that the recovery of this proposition is involved in the interpretation process for an utterance like (11). Thus according to Sperber and Wilson's (1986a) Relevance Theory a hearer will have understood (11) provided that he has recovered its intended explicit content and its intended implicit content (its implicatures). An assumption such as the one in (13) that identifies a relation between the two segments does not play a role in the interpretation process at all.

Even if understanding (11) did involve the recovery of a distinct proposition whose truth is suggested by *but*, it is difficult to see how it could be the one in (13). Like Grice, Rieber does not explain what he means by "contrast." It would have to be extremely general to account for the full range of use of *but* (cf. Blakemore 2000, Iten 2000b), and as Iten (2000b) points out, no matter how generally it is defined, it is difficult to see how it could accommodate the use of *but* in (14):

(14) That's not my sister but my mother.

At the same time, however, it would have to account for the differences in meaning between *but* and

other so-called contrastive DMs such as *on the other hand*, *nevertheless*, and *although*.

Bach (1999b) also analyzes *but* in terms of contrast. However, he proposes that the contrast it encodes must be pragmatically enriched on particular occasions of use. More importantly, in contrast with both Rieber and Grice, he rejects the idea that the analysis of non-truth-conditional DMs requires the postulation of a distinct proposition whose truth is suggested rather than asserted. Expressions which have been analyzed as carrying conventional implicatures, he argues, are either part of what is said or means for performing higher-order speech acts. *But* falls into the first category. His argument is as follows: since "the *that*-clause in an indirect quotation specifies what is said in the utterance being reported" (1999b: 339), the fact that *but* can occur in an indirect quotation like (15) and, moreover, be understood as part of what is being reported, means that it contributes straightforwardly to what is said.

(15) Anne said that Sheila is rich but she is unhappy.

The fact that *but* appears not to contribute to the truth conditions of the utterances that contain it is, says Bach, the result of forced choice. Contrary to popular opinion, Bach argues, an utterance may express more than one proposition. The fact that *but* does not seem to contribute to truth conditions is due to the fact that it contributes to a proposition, which, while truth-conditional, is "secondary to the main point of the utterance" (1999b: 328). This proposition is not a conventional implicature whose truth is indicated by *but*. It is a proposition yielded when *but* combines with the rest of the sentence. In other words, according to Bach, *but* is an operator which preserves the propositions expressed while yielding a new one.

As Blakemore (2000) points out, there is a range of constructions and devices which can be indirectly quoted in an embedded construction. These include focal stress and expressions associated with vague stylistic effects (e.g. *the bastard*). It is not easy to see how these could be analyzed as contributing to something (propositional) with truth conditions. Moreover, as Iten (2000b) observes, Bach's technical notion of saying is quite different from the natural language "saying" that introduces indirect quotations, and consequently it is not clear that his "IQ" (= indirect quotation) test is indeed the right diagnostic for identifying "what is said" in the technical sense.

2.2 Argumentation Theory

Anscombe and Ducrot's (1977, 1989) Argumentation Theory (AT) begins, as the speech act theoretic accounts of Grice and Rieber do, as an attempt to accommodate non-truth-conditional meaning within a framework which assumes that utterances have truth-conditional content. However, as Iten (2000a) says, it ends up as a theory in which truth conditions play no role at all. This means that the issues that the theory raises go beyond the concerns of this chapter. On the other hand, since AT claims to provide an alternative answer to the question of how we analyze the (non-truth-conditional) contribution of DMs, and since their analysis of the French equivalent of *but* (that is, *mais*) has been influential,⁷ it cannot be ignored here.⁸ I shall, however, restrict the discussion to those features of their analyses that distinguish the AT approach from the conventional implicature approach to DMs (above) and the relevance-theoretic approach (cf. section 2.3).

According to the original (1976) version of AT, utterances have not only informational content, but also argumentative orientation. The role of argumentative potential in Anscombe and Ducrot's theory derives from their observation that two utterances with the same truth-conditional content cannot always be used to support the same sort of conclusions (see Anscombe and Ducrot 1976: 10). This led them to develop a theory of *pragmatique intégrée*, or in other words a theory of linguistically encoded non-truth-conditional meaning. For example, within this framework, *but* is an argumentative operator which constrains the argumentative orientation of the utterances that contain it. Thus according to Anscombe and Ducrot (1977), the speaker of (11) must be understood to be presenting the second segment as an argument that (a) is for a conclusion which contradicts the conclusion of an argument from the first segment, and (b) is a stronger argument than the argument from the first segment. The use of *but* in (14) imposes a different constraint: the second segment must be understood as a reason for rejecting the first segment, and the two segments have to represent the same kind of fact in ways that are incompatible with each other.

Anscombe and Ducrot's "arguments" are not captured by standard rules of logic, even in the early version of their theory, when the argumentative potential of an utterance is defined in terms of the conclusions it is used to support. Their revisions to the definition of argumentative strength, which features in the analysis of *but* (above), have led to a notion of argumentation which is even less recognizable from the point of view of standard logic, since it does not involve inferences from contents at all.⁹ Because Anscombe and Ducrot (hereafter A and D) do not re-analyze *but* in terms of these revised definitions, one cannot say whether they yield an improved analysis.¹⁰ However, it is difficult to see how a revised AT analysis of *but* would overcome the problems outlined by Iten (2000b). In particular, it is difficult to see how a revised analysis would enable A and D to account for the discourse initial and fragmentary uses of *but* discussed above.

On the other hand, it seems that A and D's move away from an analysis in which the meaning of *but* is a constituent of a proposition which isn't a truth condition (cf. Grice or Rieber) to one in which it is analyzed as a constraint on interpretation is a move in the right direction. Not only does it avoid the problems discussed above (section 2.1), but also it captures the elusiveness of expressions like *but*. Native speakers of English find it more difficult to pin down what *but* or *well* mean than to say how they are used. Similarly, it is difficult to say whether expressions like *but*, *nevertheless*, *yet*, and *although* are synonymous without investigating how they are used in context. As Wilson and Sperber (1993: 16) say, this is why A and D's analysis of *but* as a constraint on use is so insightful.

The question is, however, whether the meanings of all expressions which have been analyzed as DMs are elusive in this way, and hence whether A and D's analysis for *but* should be extended to all non-truth-conditional expressions. As I have said, A and D take a radical stand, arguing that no expression of language should be analyzed in terms of content. I do not wish to discuss the implications of this here. However, it is important to recognize that the agenda underlying AT has led to a tendency to see any theory which argues for the existence of non-truth-conditional meaning as being consistent with AT and hence to blur the AT conception of procedural meaning with other conceptions. In particular, it has led to a confusion between the AT approach to non-truth-conditional meaning and the relevance-theoretic one (see below) so that, for example, Moeschler (1999) analyzes expressions like *because*, which according to RT encodes conceptual meaning, as an example of procedural meaning in a framework which he describes as relevance-theoretic. It seems that Moeschler's use of the term "procedural" here owes more to the non-cognitive AT approach than to the cognitive RT approach outlined in the following section.

2.3 Relevance Theory

Within the framework of Sperber and Wilson's (1986a) Relevance Theory (RT), it has been argued that the speech act theoretic distinction between describing and indicating should be replaced by a cognitive distinction between two ways in which linguistic meaning can contribute to the inferential processes involved in utterance interpretation: either it may encode constituents of the conceptual representations that undergo these processes or it may encode procedural information or constraints on those processes (cf. Blakemore 1987, 1989, 1996, 1997, 2000). In contrast with AT (above), RT assumes that inferential comprehension involves the construction and manipulation of conceptual representations: hence the possibility of the RT distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning.

Bach (1999b: 361) has argued that this distinction is vacuous since "in some way or other anything one utters constrains the inferential phase of comprehension." It is indeed true that the inferences a hearer makes in the course of utterance interpretation depend on conceptual content in the sense that this is what interacts with the context in derivation of contextual effects. However, the effects derived also depend on the contextual assumptions used and the type of inferential computation performed. Thus (16b) can be interpreted either as evidence for the proposition that Stanley can open Oscar's safe, in which case it is functioning as a premise, or as a consequence of the assumption that Stanley can open Oscar's safe, in which case it is functioning as a conclusion.

- (16) a. Stanley can open Oscar's safe.
 - b. He knows the combination.
- [adapted from Hobbs 1979]

The claim that linguistic meaning can encode constraints on the inferential phase of comprehension means that there are linguistic expressions, *after all* and so, for example, which encode information about which of these inferential procedures yields the intended interpretation. (See Traugott, this volume.)

Within RT the fact that languages have developed means for encoding information about inferential processes can be explained in terms of the principle which, according to Sperber and Wilson, governs all communication. According to them, every act of ostensive communication comes with a guarantee of its own OPTIMAL RELEVANCE: that is, the speaker is communicating her belief, first, that the utterance is relevant enough to be worth processing and, second, that this level of relevance is the highest level she is capable of given her interests and preferences. Since the degree of relevance increases with the number of effects derived but decreases with the amount of processing effort required for their derivation, the use of an expression which encodes a procedure for identifying the intended contextual effects would be consistent with the speaker's aim of achieving relevance for a minimum cost in processing.¹¹

The idea that linguistic meaning can encode constraints on relevance has been applied to the analysis of a range of non-truth-conditional DMs in a range of languages.¹² At the same time, however, further investigation of the role of linguistic meaning in interpretation has shown that the distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning is not after all equivalent to the distinction between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional meaning, as Blakemore (1987) originally argued, and hence that the notion of procedural meaning does not provide the basis for an account of non-truth-conditional meaning. On the one hand, it has been shown that there are expressions – pronouns and mood indicators, for example – which encode procedures but which affect the truth conditions of the utterances that contain them (cf. B. Clark 1991, Wilson and Sperber 1993, Ziv 1998). On the other hand, it has been shown that there are non-truth-conditional expressions – for example, sentence adverbials like *frankly* and DMs like *in contrast*, *in other words*, *as a result* – which encode concepts rather than procedures (cf. Wilson and Sperber 1993, Ifantidou-Trouki 1993, Blakemore 1996, Iten 2000b).

This might seem to suggest that the procedural analysis outlined above is on the wrong track. However, this would be to assume that THE distinction between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional meaning is *the* fundamental distinction in a cognitively grounded theory of linguistic meaning, and it is not at all clear that this is justified. Thus it has been argued by Sperber and Wilson (1986a) and Carston (1988, 2000, this volume) that the gap between linguistically encoded meaning and truth-conditional content means that linguistic decoding does not deliver representations with truth conditions, but conceptual representations which are developed by pragmatic inference into representations with truth conditions. This suggests that linguistic semantics is not concerned with the relation between linguistic form and the external world (as in Gazdar 1979) but with the relation between elements of linguistic form and the cognitive information they encode. In this picture, the question that matters is not whether a linguistic expression contributes to truth conditions but rather what kind of cognitive information it encodes – conceptual or procedural.

The research program suggested by this picture is one in which DMs feature as evidence not only for the distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning but also for a clearer understanding of what is meant for an expression to encode either a concept or a pragmatic procedure. Thus, following Wilson and Sperber (1993), Blakemore (1996, 1997), Rouchota (1998), and Iten (2000b) have explored the properties of a range of DMs in order to develop sharper tests for distinguishing conceptual non-truth-conditional meaning from procedural non-truth-conditional meaning. Some of this work has centered on the fact that in contrast with expressions that encode concepts – for example, *in contrast* – expressions that encode procedures do not undergo regular compositional semantic interpretation rules. Thus while the meaning of *complete* combines with the meaning of *in contrast* to create a new complex concept, the meaning of *but* cannot be modified in this way.

(17) Stanley spends the whole day inside. In complete contrast, Oscar only comes in for meals.

As Rouchota (1998) and Blakemore (2000) have pointed out, although more than one procedural expression can be used in a single utterance, as in (18), it is not clear that the procedures they encode

combine to form larger, more complex procedures.

(18) Oscar has already eaten. But nevertheless I'll leave him some milk.

Other work (e.g. Blakemore 1996) has focused on the difference between the way procedural and conceptual DMs behave in fragmentary utterances (cf. (9–10)), demonstrating that the conceptual/procedural distinction offers an explanation for these differences not provided by (for example) Grice's conventional implicature approach.

More recently, attention has moved to the question of what it is that is encoded by expressions like *but* or *well*. Originally, procedural DMs were analyzed as encoding information about the inferential route involved in the derivation of the intended cognitive effects. For example, *but* was analyzed as encoding the information that the relevance of the utterance that contained it lay in the effect derived from following the route of contradiction and elimination (cf. Blakemore 1989). This raised the question of whether all procedural information is like this. As Blakemore (2000) and Iten (2000b) have shown, this narrow conception of procedural meaning cannot capture the differences between closely related but different DMs – *but*, *nevertheless*, *however*, *although*, for instance – and hence must be broadened to include all information about the inferential processes involved in utterance interpretation, including, for example, context selection. While the resulting analyses are unlikely to be the last word on these difficult expressions, it seems that they are capable of capturing the elusive and subtle distinctions not captured by the analyses of Grice, Rieber, or Bach (above) in a cognitively motivated theory of inference (cf. Argumentation Theory).

3 DMs and Coherence

It will be recalled that DMs are defined not only in terms of the kind of meaning they encode but also by their function in establishing connectivity in discourse. However, it would seem that this function does not feature in the RT research program just outlined, and hence that RT is unable to account for what many theorists take to be the primary role of DMs. In fact, the omission of discourse connectivity from this program is deliberate, deriving from a theoretical position in which discourse coherence is a derivative notion defined in terms of the search for optimal relevance. Thus the analysis of DMs is the center of the debate between RT and those theorists who see the connectivity of discourse as being central to utterance interpretation (see Kehler, this volume).¹³

As I have represented it, this debate is between RT and a united group of theorists who see connectivity as a primary function of DMs. In fact, as Schourup (1999) recognizes, this connectivity is conceived of in different ways. In this section, I shall attempt to tease these apart and then finally return to the general debate described above. This will not be a comprehensive or exhaustive account of the various accounts of discourse – it will, for example, focus on those accounts which see the unity of discourse in terms of relationships between adjacent units of text or discourse and ignore questions about the explanation of global coherence (cf. Samet and Schank 1984).¹⁴

3.1 Cohesion

As we have seen, for Fraser (1996) it is the connective role of DMs that distinguishes them from other discourse markers (e.g. illocutionary and attitudinal adverbials). Fraser conceives of connectivity as connectivity *between* textual units rather than *within* a textual unit. There is considerable disagreement about what exactly a textual unit is. Sometimes they are “units of talk” (Schiffrin 1987: 31). Sometimes they are utterances (e.g. Levinson 1983, Redeker 1991). And sometimes it is argued that language is produced in intonational units which reflect the organization of information (and do not necessarily correspond to syntactic units (cf. Chafe 1987)).¹⁵ Fraser himself seems to assume that DMs connect utterances and that they are distinct from coordinators such as *and* or subordinators such as *because* or *although*, which encode connections within utterances. However, as Schourup (1999) observes, it is not clear that connectivity alone is sufficient for this distinction. Indeed, some writers who see DMs as encoding discourse relations do not wish to draw the distinction at all and list *and* and *because* as DMs alongside expressions like *as a result* and *however* (e.g. Halliday and Hasan 1976, Knott and Dale 1994).

The idea that DMs encode structural relations between units of text is inspired by Halliday and

Hasan's (hereafter H and H) (1976) *Cohesion in English*. This seems odd when one remembers the assumption underlying their work, namely that "a text is a unit of language in use" (my emphasis) and not "a grammatical unit like a clause or sentence" (H and H 1976: 1–2). Given H and H's insistence that a text is not some kind of super-sentence, it is difficult to reconcile the Hallidayan commitment of writers (e.g. Hovy 1990) with their search for structural relations between units of text which are analogous to the hierarchical structure of sentences.

The explanation would seem to lie in the fact that although H and H do not regard a text as a grammatical unit, they do assume that there is a system of rules which relate linguistically determined patterns of connection – that is, COHESION – with texts in the same way that a grammar is said to pair sounds and meanings. Thus they argue that "although a text does not consist of sentences, it is REALIZED or encoded in sentences" (1976: 2).

Amongst the cohesive devices identified by H and H are a set which we would recognize as DMs but which H and H themselves call "conjunctive devices." They propose a complex taxonomy of conjunctions (cf. H and H 1976: 242–3) according to which the different types of conjunctive relations (additive, adversative, causal, temporal) can hold either at an "ideational" level, in which case they are relations between language and the world (e.g. (19)), or at an "internal" or "interpersonal" level, in which case they are defined in terms of a relation between language and the hearer/audience (e.g. (20)).

(19) She was never really happy here. So she's leaving.

(20) A: She'll be better off in a new place.

B: So she's leaving?

[H and H 1976: 241]

This idea that DMs can operate on different planes is developed in the work of theorists like Schiffrin (1987) and Redeker (1991). The idea that a research program involves the taxonomy of conjunctive or discourse relations is similarly pervasive. As we shall see in the following section, within the text representation frameworks of, for example, Mann and Thompson (1986, 1988), the classification of DMs follows from the assumption that they encode connections whose identification is necessary for utterance understanding. It is more difficult to see what kind of explanatory role H and H's taxonomies serve since they are not concerned with providing a theory of utterance understanding. But equally, it is not clear whether their classifications are descriptively adequate since they do not reflect the differences between the uses of related DMs. For example, while examples like (21) and (22) would seem to suggest that *but* and *nevertheless* fall into different categories, as H and H suggest, it is not clear how their subcategories "containing *and*" and "emphatic" contribute to an explanation of this contrast or, indeed, how the label "adversative 'proper'" contributes to an explanation of what these expressions have in common. At the same time, H and H's three-way sub-classification of expressions which encode "proper adversative connections" cross-cuts the contrast between (23), where the whole sequence is interpreted as communicating an attitude of (e.g.) outrage, which can be communicated implicitly in an *and* conjunction (cf. (24)), and the examples in (25–26), where the second segment receives a "denial of expectation" sort of interpretation (not recoverable from (24)).¹⁶

(21) I have received the e-mail, but it's in Dutch.

(22) I have received the e-mail. ?Nevertheless it's in Dutch.

(23) Her husband is in hospital. Yet she's seeing other men.

(24) Her husband is in hospital and she's seeing other men.

(25) Her husband is in hospital. But she's seeing other men.

(26) Her husband is in hospital. Nevertheless she's seeing other men.

It is now generally recognized that cohesion, as defined by H and H, is neither necessary nor sufficient for textual unity, and hence that cohesive devices are superficial symptoms of a deeper relation.¹⁷ In the next section we shall see what role DMs have played in the analysis of this relation.

3.2 Coherence and discourse representation

In contrast with cohesion, coherence is a cognitive notion: it is a notion which, it is argued, people use when interpreting utterances: "coherence relations ... should be thought of in psychological terms as a set of conceptual relations used by readers and writers when processing text" (Knott and Sanders 1998: 136). This hypothesis is based on the assumption that the hearer of a text constructs a representation of the information it contains which integrates the propositions expressed into a larger whole. Thus coherence relations are the various ways in which this integration takes place.

The question that has dominated research within this approach is: What is the set of coherence relations involved in this integration? As Hovy (1990) observes, there is a striking lack of consensus here: the number varies from two to over 100. This is largely due to differences between the way they have been conceived – for example, as propositional relations (cf. Hobbs 1979, Mann and Thompson 1988) or as intentional relations (cf. Grosz and Sidner 1990) – and recently there have been a number of attempts to resolve this issue.¹⁸ However, there have also been attempts to show how DMs shed light on the classification of coherence relations. Thus the central idea of Knott and Dale's (1994) work is that, on the assumption that language is adapted to the communicative needs of its users, it is reasonable to suppose that a study of the means for signaling relations in language will yield (linguistic) evidence for the relations speakers of the language actually use.

Sanders et al. (1992) take a different approach to the classification of coherence relations. They argue that it is cognitively implausible that speakers have knowledge of all the relations that have been proposed, and that it is more attractive to generate the set of coherence relations by combining the members of a set of four primitive cognitive categories: (i) basic operation (CAUSAL OR ADDITIVE); (ii) source of coherence (SEMANTIC OR PRAGMATIC); (iii) polarity (NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE); (iv) order of segments (BASIC OR NON-BASIC). They argue that support for these primitives is provided by psycholinguistic experiments, including one in which Dutch-speaking subjects were asked to decide which of a given set of DMs should be used in a sample text. The assumption was that these markers "provided an experimental window on the relations being used by the subjects" (Knott and Sanders 1998).

Within this approach it is argued that since DMs make existing coherent relations explicit, not every connective can express every relation. However, at the same time, it seems that the distinctions that have been drawn between coherence relations do not reflect the (very subtle) distinctions between the meanings of certain connectives. For example, the differences between *but*, *nevertheless*, *although*, *however*, *whereas*, and *yet* are not captured in an analysis which links them to a contrastive or adversative relation.¹⁹ Recently, Sanders and Noordman (2000) have argued that there is experimental evidence which supports the view that whereas coherence relations are part of the discourse representation itself, DMs merely "guide the reader in selecting the right relation" (Sanders and Noordman 2000: 56). While it seems correct to think of these expressions as mere guides to interpretation, in the sense that they encode a processing direction rather than an element of the interpretation derived, it would seem that in treating, say, *yet* as a guide for selecting the relation of contrast we would be failing to identify those aspects of its encoded meaning which distinguish its contribution to the interpretation of the utterances that contain it from that of, say, *but*. This suggests that either we accept that not every aspect of the contribution of these expressions can be explained in terms of the role they play in coherence or we conclude that each of the expressions just listed is linked to a different coherence relation. The first suggestion leaves us with the problem of saying what role these expressions play in interpretation in addition to the search for coherence, while the second leads to the proliferation of undefined coherence relations.

As we have seen, RT also views certain DMs as "guides" to interpretation. However, in contrast with Sanders and Noordman, there is no assumption that interpretation involves the identification of coherence relations. I shall return to this issue in the final section. First, let us take a non-cognitive detour and consider the approach to coherence underlying Schiffrin's (1987) analysis of DMs.

3.3 Coherence: functional approaches

Schiffrin's (1987) study of DMs is located on a theoretical map in which approaches to language are either structural (or formal) or functional (cf. Schiffrin 1994: 20–3). This distinction cross-cuts the distinction between cognitive approaches to language and non-cognitive approaches, with the (odd) result that Chomsky's mentalist theory of grammar is found on the structuralist side of the divide

along with Harris (1951). It would also seem to mean that cognitive approaches to discourse representation (e.g. Sanders and Noordman 2000) and RT are to be aligned with the non-cognitive approaches to text structure of, for example, van Dijk (1977) or Hovy (1990). As we have seen, Sanders and Noordman do not regard discourse relations simply as tools for describing text structure (cf. Hovy 1990), but claim that these relations model cognitive mechanisms involved in processing text. We have also seen that for RT the object of study is neither discourse behavior (as for Schiffrin) nor discourse structure, but the cognitive processes involved in achieving communication through language, and that, in contrast with both the cognitive and the non-cognitive approaches to discourse, and indeed Schiffrin's own functional approach, it does not leave room for relations between segments of discourse at all.

Schiffrin's approach is firmly functionalist in the sense that her study of DMs is part of the study of actual behavior. She argues that DMs provide two kinds of "contextual co-ordinates within which an utterance is produced and designed to be interpreted" (1987: 315). First, they link utterances to the surrounding text and to the speaker/hearer. For example, she analyzes *but* as both returning a speaker to an earlier point of text and continuing a speaker's action. Second, they link utterances to different "planes of talk." Thus *but* locates the utterance within an ideational structure (since it marks contrasting ideas), an action structure (since it marks contrasting speech acts), and an exchange structure (since it can continue a turn). In this way DMs contribute toward the "integration of different components of talk" (1987: 330) or in other words to coherence.

It might be thought that by analyzing *but* as functioning on several planes of talk simultaneously Schiffrin is able to account for its wide range of uses in a single analysis. However, it seems that Schiffrin assumes that *but* is distinguished from other expressions that continue a turn by marking contrast either at an ideational or speech act level. As I have already indicated, this is explanatory only to the extent that the notion of contrast is itself explained. At the same time, it is not clear that *but*, or indeed any DM, actually *encodes* information about turn taking. It does seem to be true that DMs play different roles in turn taking so that while *but* and *and* are used in the continuation of a turn, so is used in relinquishing a turn (cf. Schiffrin 1987: 218). However, as Wilson (1994b) argues, these functions can be inferred from the encoded meaning of these expressions together with the assumption that the speaker has been optimally relevant. For example, "by saying *and*, the speaker will have put the hearer to gratuitous processing effort unless either she is allowed to complete the utterance, or the proposition she was about to express can be easily inferred" (Wilson 1994b: 22). This suggests that the multi-functionality of DMs should be revisited in the light of the distinction between linguistically encoded meaning and pragmatically inferred meaning.

3.4 Conclusion: DMs, coherence, and relevance

The assumption underlying Wilson's argument is that an account of the semantics of DMs is an account of what they encode. This view contrasts with the one outlined in section 2.1, where semantics is defined as a theory of truth conditions and DMs have no semantics but only a pragmatics. It is not difficult to see why DMs qualify for inclusion in this book on the latter view. However, it might seem that their presence in a book about pragmatics might need explanation if their contribution to the interpretation of the utterances that contain them is, as relevance theorists have argued, a matter for semantics. The question, then, is how does the information they encode have a bearing on pragmatic interpretation?

According to one approach, the answer is that they encode information about coherence relations, or, as Sanders and Noordman (2000) have argued, they encode directions for selecting the right coherence relation. On this approach, pragmatic interpretation is constrained by the search for coherence, in that pragmatic interpretation is a by-product of a theory of discourse acceptability, which is defined in terms of coherence.

RT has argued, however, that we should not see comprehension as a byproduct of discourse acceptability (= coherence), but rather as the key to our intuitions about coherence. Thus for example, it is argued that the tendency to search for chronological and causal relations in a discourse is itself a consequence of a general principle grounded in human cognition which provides a guarantee that all ostensibly communicated information comes with a guarantee of optimal relevance. As Blakemore and Carston (1999) have shown, while in some cases (e.g. (27)) the search for optimal relevance leads to an interpretation in which the discourse maps onto a cognitive unit or

schema in which one event is a necessary precursor for another, in other cases (e.g. (28)) the search for relevance leads to a non-chronological interpretation.

(27) Oscar knocked the vase and it broke.

(28) A: Did Oscar break the vase?

B: WELL | the VASE BROKE | and HE knocked it.

[fall-rise nuclear tones in both clauses] (example due to Larry Horn)

(29) A: All linguists can spell.

B: STANLEY can't SPELL | and HE'S A LINGUIST

[fall-rise nuclear tones in both clauses]

The fact that examples like (28) are highlighted by particular stress and intonation patterns indicate that in contrast with, for example, (27), they are not unmarked cases requiring the least effortful assumption of chronological progression.

Similarly, Blass (1990) has argued that while the search for optimal relevance may lead to a coherent interpretation in which the assumptions made accessible by the interpretation of one utterance are used in establishing the relevance of the next, there are cases in which neither the interpretation of the first segment of a discourse sequence nor the contextual assumptions used in deriving that interpretation play a role in the interpretation of the second. Consider, for example (30):

(30) A: Where did you put my pen?

B: Oscar's just brought in a mouse.

The suggestion, then, is that if a discourse sequence is coherent, then this is because the optimally relevant interpretation is one in which the assumptions made accessible by one segment are used in the interpretation of the next.²⁰

It might be argued that DMs could still be markers of coherence in this framework, since they are used precisely in those cases in which the interpretation of one segment is used in the interpretation of the next. As we have seen, the fact that (16a) provides a highly accessible context for the interpretation of (16b) is consistent with (at least) two different interpretations.

(16) a. Stanley can open Oscar's safe.

b. He knows the combination.

[adapted from Hobbs 1979]

This would suggest that the role of *so* or *after all* would be to signal how the interpretation of (a) is used for interpreting (b) – or, in other words, how the segments are connected.

However, this would be to suggest that RT is simply arguing that the notion of discourse coherence should be replaced by relevance so that we can speak of the encoding of relevance relations rather than coherence relations. This would be to miss the point that discourse, whether it is construed in structural or interactional terms, is an artifact and that coherence is a property of that artifact. Relevance is not a property of discourse, but rather of a mentally represented interpretation derived through cognitive processes.²¹

Moreover, the suggestion that DMs are markers of coherence would not be able to account for the fact that some DMs can be used discourse initially. Recall (8):

(8) [the hearer has arrived home laden with parcels]

So you've spent all your money.

As Blakemore (1987) and Rouchota (1998) have argued, these examples can be accommodated in an account which analyzes DMs as encoding constraints on the relevance of the utterances that contain them rather than connections between discourse segments. Thus, according to Blakemore (1987), *so* encodes the information that the utterance it introduces is relevant as a contextual implication of a

mutually manifest assumption. This means that the only difference between the use of *so* in (8) and the one in (31) is that the assumption from which *you've spent all your money* is derived is made mutually manifest through perception rather than verbal communication.

(31) There's nothing in your wallet. So you've spent all your money.

At the same time, this analysis provides a framework for explaining why not all DMs can be used discourse initially (cf. Blakemore 1998).

If this is a gain, however, it is made at the expense of the loss of what many theorists have regarded as a useful category. For not all the expressions that have been classified as DMs can be analyzed as procedural constraints on relevance. For example, *besides*, *as a result*, and *in contrast* encode concepts and are constituents of propositional representations. This means that in adopting a relevance-theoretic approach we would lose not only a unified theory of non-truth-conditional meaning, but also a unified theory of the expressions that play a role in the way discourse is understood. For some this may be insupportable. On the other hand, given the conceptual confusion surrounding the notion of an indicator (cf. section 2.1) and the lack of agreement over what counts as a DM (cf. section 1), it may seem unsurprising, and perhaps even as progress.

The suggestion that the term "Discourse Marker" does not after all apply to a single class of expressions is not intended as a call to cease research on the expressions that have been given this label. On the contrary, as we have seen, these expressions have implications for many of the fundamental issues covered in this volume. In this chapter I have focused on the issues which derive from the two properties that are generally associated with expressions which are given the label "Discourse Marker," namely, their non-truth-conditionality and their role in the organization of discourse. This choice of focus has meant that I have ignored other issues, for example, issues surrounding the historical development of DMs, which, as Traugott (1982, 1995, this volume) and Schwenter and Traugott (2000) have shown, can be seen as part of the study of the process of grammaticalization. However, as Traugott's work shows, questions about the evolution of DMs cannot be answered without taking theoretical decisions about the domain of pragmatics, the relationship between linguistic form and pragmatic interpretation, and the nature of the principles constraining the interpretation of utterances in discourse. At the same time, these theoretical decisions must themselves be based on the kind of detailed synchronic and diachronic investigation of individual expressions that I have not been able to give in this chapter.

1 For a discussion of alternative terminology, see Brinton (1996) and Fraser (1996); for a discussion of the relative merits of DISCOURSE MARKER AND DISCOURSE PARTICLE, see Schourup (1999).

2 As Schourup (1999) says, there are issues concerning the extent to which generalizations about English DMs apply to other languages. However, note that there is a growing literature on DMs in languages other than English. See for example Anscombre and Ducrot (1977), Moeschler (1989), Hansen (1997) for French, Blass (1990) for Sissala, Pander Maat and Sanders (2000) and Sanders and Noordman (2000) for Dutch, Schwenter (1996) for Spanish, Takahara (1998) and Higashimori (1994) for Japanese, Park (1998) for Korean, and Ziv (1998) for Hebrew.

3 For a detailed discussion of the semantics-pragmatics distinction, see Recanati and Bach (this volume).

4 As we shall see, Bach (1999b) has taken issue with the idea that there is non-truth-conditional meaning.

5 For a comprehensive account of Grice's notion of implicature, see Horn (this volume).

6 Cf. Blakemore's (2000) and Iten's (2000b) relevance-theoretic accounts of the differences between *but*, *nevertheless*, *although*.

7 See, for example, König (1985), Winter and Rimon (1994).

8 For a fuller discussion, see Moeschler and Reboul (1994), Iten (2000a, b).

9 Cf. Moeschler (1989), who suggests that questions about the nature of argumentation in AT can be captured in a cognitively based theory of inference.

10 In fact Iten (2000b) argues that the revised definitions raise difficulties for the analysis of *but*.

11 For a more comprehensive introduction to Relevance Theory, see Blakemore (1992), Wilson (1994a, this volume), and Carston (this volume).

12 See for example, Gutt (1988), Blass (1990), Jucker (1993), Higashimori (1994), Rouchota (1998), Iten (2000b).

13 For a comprehensive account of this debate, see Giora (1997, 1998), Wilson (1998a), and Blakemore (2001).

14 This focus means that there will be no discussion of topic-based accounts of discourse coherence; see Giora (1997, 1998), Wilson (1998a).

15 For further discussion of this issue, see Unger (1996).

16 Examples (24–25) are due to Kitis (1995). For further discussion, see Blakemore and Carston (1999).

17 For further discussion, see Hobbs (1978, 1979), Blass (1990), Blakemore (2001).

18 E.g. see Sanders and Spooren (1999), Sanders and Noordman (2000).

19 As Iten (2000b) has shown, the distinction between “adversative” and “concessive” markers sheds little light on the differences between these expressions.

20 For further discussion, see Unger (1996), Blakemore (2000).

21 It should be noted that this departs from the position suggested in Blakemore (1987) and from the position suggested by the title of Blass's (1990) book, *Relevance Relations in Discourse*.

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