



Tikrit University

College of Education for Humanities

English Department

PhD Studies / Discourse Analysis

Historical Discourse Analysis

Dr. Muhammed Badea Ahmed

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- Following van Dijk's four-volume *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (1985), the historical analysis of discourse was unrecognized, a wealth of studies, which have been variously termed:
 - “New Philology” (Fleischman 1990), -“post-/interdisciplinary philology” (Sell 1994),
 - “Historical discourse analysis” or “historical text linguistics” (Enkvist and Wårvik 1987: 222), -“diachronic textlinguistics” (Fries 1983), “historical pragmatics” (Stein 1985b; Jucker 1994).
- these studies range from detailed accounts of particular discourse forms in individual languages to programmatic statements concerning the nature or usefulness.
- It follows, this new field of endeavor locates discourse analysis in relation to historical linguistics and, alternatively, historical linguistics in relation to discourse analysis, and by exploring the mutual contributions of these disciplines as well as their possible synthesis

Scope of discourse analysis

- When one attempts to survey the field of historical discourse analysis the major difficulty is the determination of what is encompassed by discourse analysis itself.
- Standard treatments of discourse analysis (e.g. Stubbs 1983; Brown and Yule 1983; Schiffrin 1994) cover a wide range of topics including ,

cohesion

and coherence, anaphora, information structuring (topic/comment, given/new, focus),

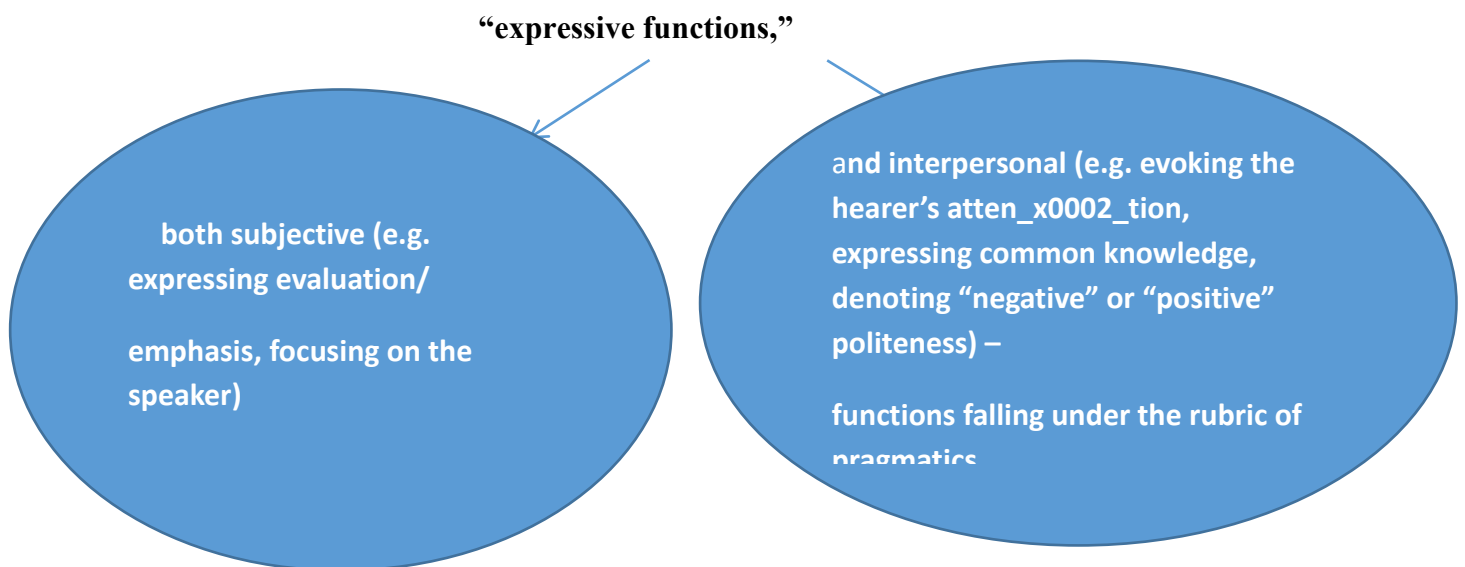
turn-taking, boundary/peak marking, grounding, topic or participant tracking, dis_x0002_course markers, and segmentation (paragraph or episode marking), on the one hand

and inference, implicature, presupposition, maxims of conversation, relevance, the Cooperative Principle, politeness, and speech acts, on the other hand.

- Of particular concern is problem of distinction between discourse analysis and pragmatics ,
- As stated by Levinson (1983), textbook account of pragmatics covers many of the same issues as do accounts of discourse analysis; pragmatics is sometimes said to encompass discourse analysis – or the reverse.

- discourse analysis is more text-centered, more static, more interested in product (in the well-formedness of texts), while pragmatics is more user-centered, more dynamic, more interested in the process of text production.
- Discourse analysis is frequently equated with conversational analysis, and pragmatics with speech act theory.

It would seem difficult to distinguish the two with any conviction, however; for example, discourse markers, such as well, so, or you know, have both “textual” functions in organizing discourse (e.g. marking topic or participant change, narrative segmentation, discourse type, saliency, fore/background) – functions falling more under the rubric of discourse analysis- and



- Following Stubbs (1983), it is useful to understand the field of discourse analysis broadly as ,
 - “the linguistic analysis of naturally occurring *connected* spoken or written discourse” as being concerned with the level above that of the individual sentence:

with intersentential connections, with global rather than local features, and with those forms that serve to bind sentences

 - No attempt will be made here to differentiate with any exactness between discourse analysis and pragmatics, though the emphasis will be on the more formal aspects of text structure, such as discourse markers or grounding, rather than on the more notional elements of text semantics, such as presupposition or conversational maxims, or on aspects of language use

Scope of historical discourse analysis

As a cross-disciplinary field, historical discourse analysis may be approached from at least two different directions:

- The first approach may be termed **historical discourse analysis** which involves an application of discourse analysis to language history. It is the study of discourse forms, functions, or structures encompassed by discourse analysis in earlier periods of a language. The attention of the discourse analyst is focused on historical stages of a language, yet the emphasis remains on discourse structure.
- The advantage of such an approach is that it may more satisfactorily explain the functions of many features of older texts.
- this approach is essentially *synchronic*, since it involves an analysis, albeit a discourse-oriented one, of a language at a particular stage in its development

Within such an approach, there are two possible steps,

one mapping form to function (the explication of the discourse functions of particular historical forms) and the other mapping function to form (the identification of historical forms which are exponents).

The second approach may be termed discourse-oriented historical linguistics which involves an application of discourse analysis to historical linguistics. It is the study of “discourse-pragmatic factors” in language change or of the discourse motivations behind diachronic changes, whether phonological, morphological, syntactic, or semantic.

The attention of the historical linguist is focused on discourse matters, yet the emphasis remains on language change. It should be noted that a consideration of discourse factors in certain kinds of diachronic change, such as word order change, is not recent, and an interest in discourse-driven or influenced change can now be seen as almost commonplace.

- Such an approach has the advantage of providing elucidation of certain changes and a fuller understanding of diachronic processes of change..4 An extension of this approach (dating back to Givón 1979a) involves the study of how an element functioning on the discourse level comes to function on the morphosyntactic or semantic level.

- A third approach may be termed **diachronic(ally oriented) discourse analysis**, though less well developed than the others, is more truly interdisciplinary, involving a synthesis of discourse and diachrony. It involves a study of the changes in discourse marking, functions, and structures over time. That is, discourse structure is treated on a par with phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic structure as something which changes and develops over time, so that one might legitimately talk of *discours(al) change* as well as, for example, *phonological change*.

1 Historical Discourse Analysis

Historical stages of a language often contain apparently meaningless words and particles, empty or repetitive phrases, inexplicable morphological forms or uses of inflectional forms, seemingly “primitive” stylistic features, and uncategorizable or odd text types. While traditionally many of these features have been viewed as grammatical pleonasm, metrical expedients, intensifiers or emphatics, colloquialisms, or defects of style.

Since discourse analysis has typically been concerned with the oral medium, with naturally occurring conversations, and oral narratives, this is no longer considered a serious impediment to historical discourse analysis. **First**, it is generally agreed that earlier periods of most written languages, especially medieval texts in the Indo-European languages, are products of the transition from an oral to a literate culture and, though not oral texts, contain an “oral residue”, the linguistic characteristics of an oral culture.

For Fleischman, it is precisely because discourse analysis is concerned with oral texts that it will explain many of the features of medieval literature. **Second**, much can be deduced about the oral form of earlier languages from “speech-based” genres such as court records, sermons, and dramatic dialogue as well as from more colloquial written genres such as personal letters.

Finally, it has become increasingly common to apply the techniques of discourse analysis to written texts and to recognize separate principles of discourse structure

in such texts: “written texts can be analyzed as communicative acts in their own right”.

1.1 Discourse markers

In historical discourse analysis, perhaps the most attention has been paid to what Longacre terms “mystery particles,” that is, to the “verbal and nominal affixes and sentential particles.

In contemporary discourse analysis, mystery particles are more typically termed *discourse markers* or *pragmatic markers* and include such forms as *well*, *now*, *so*, and *y’know* in Modern English. Viewed traditionally, discourse markers are considered to be of indeterminate word class and uncertain meaning. Mystery particles almost inevitably “have a function which relates to a unit larger than the sentence, i.e. to the paragraph and the discourse”

Several works have treated Old English (OE) ‘then’; it has been seen as a foregrounder, a foreground “dramatizer,” a sequencer of events, a marker of colloquial speech, a peak marker, and a narrative segmenter or primarily as a shift marker.

OE adverbials such as ‘here’ and ‘now’, as well as a variety of forms in the later periods (e.g. *before/afore/fore*, *above*, *the said*, *hereafter*), have a “text deictic” function in expressing the point where the speaker or writer is at the moment.

Fludernik has looked at the use of *so*, *but*, *and*, and *thenne* as episodic narrative markers in Middle English (ME).

Fischer (forthcoming) exemplifies the use of *marry* beginning in ME and peaking in the sixteenth century, as a textual marker used to claim the floor at the beginning of a turn and as an interpersonal marker expressing a range of speaker attitude

Shakespeare, *why* may be used as a discourse marker to draw a logical conclusion from what has gone before, often giving a tone of superiority and potential disparagement, while *what* may be used to express surprise or incredulity, which often turns into contempt or scorn.

Interjections in Early Modern English (EModE), such as *ah, alas, fie, oh, tush*, and *welaway*, Taavitsainen argues (1995), are a subset of discourse markers; they “encode speaker attitudes and communicative intentions” are “deliberate devices in manipulating reader involvement” and may serve textual functions in some genres.

In another study of Latin particles, Risselada (1994) points out that a full understanding of directive markers (e.g. *dum, age, modo, quin, vero, sane, proinde*) depends on a knowledge not only of their basic meaning but also of the level of the utterance to which they pertain and the pragmatic and contextual properties of the utterance in which they are used.

In sum, mystery particles in older stages of languages share many, if not all, of the features of discourse markers in modern languages. They are normally marginal in word class, varied in form, of high frequency, phonetically short, outside the syntactic structure of the clause, sentence-initial, lacking in propositional content, optional, difficult to translate, and stylistically stigmatized.

Moreover, they exhibit all of the textual functions – grounding, saliency or peak marking, narrative segmentation – as well as the speaker- and hearer oriented expressive functions, including those of internal and external evaluation, of modern discourse markers.