

Clause-final particles in spoken English

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This talk is about a set of elements occurring in clause-final position in spoken English called “final connectors”, “linking adverbials” or “particles”, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) 01 A: Have you seen The Editors?
 02 B: _____
 03 A: You ought to go and see that **actually/then/though/anyway/...**

Depending on B’s response to A’s question, A can attach a variety of final particles to the core proposition expressed in the clausal unit in line 3 in order to link it to B’s utterance. As shown in (1), the final position has become the host for a set of paradigmatically organized monomorphemic elements whose clausal status is not at all clear: the fact that they are deletable without altering the grammaticality and the semantic content of the clause they are attached to suggests that they are outside the clausal structure. However, intonational integration and the fact that their deletion would result in a loss of an important interpretive cue suggests that they are, in some way, linked to the clause they accompany.

In my talk I will address two questions: What is the function of these elements, and what is their grammatical status? The functional analysis of final particles, which is based on a blend of the principles of conversation analysis with a functional-grammar approach, rests upon an inspection of all occurrences of final particles in sequences of spontaneous talk-in-interaction attested in the British component of the *International Corpus of English* (ICE-GB). Three major functional domains could be identified: (i) *discourse-structural functions* (indicating a particular type of link between two subsequent units of discourse), (ii) *illocutionary functions* (e.g. modifying illocutionary force, changing illocutionary type), and (iii) *conversational functions* (e.g. improving the design of a transition-relevant place).

A major descriptive problem concerns the grammatical status of final particles since these elements do not operate on the clause level, establishing relationships between syntactic constituents, but on the discourse level, i.e. across clauses: final particles always form part of paratactic structures, linking two structurally independent clausal units produced by two different speakers or incrementally by one and the same speaker. In order to solve this problem, I will argue for a broader view of grammar, i.e. one which does not only include sentence-/clause-internal relations (=“micro-grammar”), but also integrates relations established across sentence boundaries, which I call “macro-grammar” and which includes aspects such as information structure and relations in discourse. In English, macro-grammatical elements predominantly occur in two particular *fields* (for the use of this term in German linguistics see Eisenberg 2006; Auer 1997), that is, in a structural position that either precedes (=“initial field”) or follows a completed clausal structure (=“final field”) and which is available for the indication of macro-grammatical information. The analysis of final particles will be linked to the communicative functions of the final field.

References

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