

The syntax of sentence-peripheral discourse markers: A neo-performative analysis

MARTINA WILTSCHKO & JOHANNES HEIM

University of British Columbia, Canada

In this paper, we explore the form, function and distribution of discourse markers such as *eh*, *huh*, etc. which appear to be outside the clause as in (1). They typically appear at the right periphery of the clause and are restricted to root clauses, as shown in (2).

- (1) *You have a new dog, {eh, huh, hey, right, yeah, ...}?*
= Confirm that it's true that you have a new dog.
- (2) *Anne knows that you have a new dog, {eh, huh, hey, right, yeah, ...}?*
= Confirm that it's true that Anne knows that you have a new dog.
≠ Confirm that it's true that you have a new dog.
- (3) *I have a new dog, {eh, hey, ...}?*
= Confirm that you know I have a new dog.

As discourse markers, they play an important role in interaction management: they are used to request confirmation from the addressee. Particles differ according to what the speaker expects the addressee to confirm. In (1) the addressee is asked to confirm that the proposition is true while in (3) the addressee is asked to confirm that s/he knows that the proposition is true. Interestingly, only a subset of the discourse markers (*viz. eh* and *hey*) is felicitous in the latter constellation; there is no such distributional restriction for the former one.

This difference among the discourse markers, we argue, suggests that these particles exhibit a range of syntactic properties despite their peripheral surface position. For their internal syntax, we propose a complex phrase containing an anchor to the common ground and an intonational morpheme. For their external syntax, we propose an updated version of Ross' (1970) performative hypothesis according to which the utterance of a clause is embedded in a higher structure determining the speech act (see also Speas & Tenny 2003). Consequently, discourse markers may either attach at the propositional level (yielding confirmation of truth) or else at the speech act level (yielding confirmation that the speech act of assertion is appropriate):

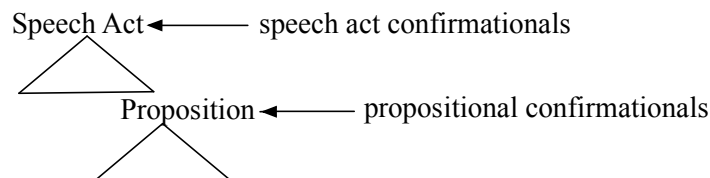


Figure 1: different combinatorial properties of discourse markers

In this paper, we explore the predictions of this neo-performative hypothesis and its implications for the syntax-pragmatics interface. Evidence based on data collected via story-board elicitation will include i) word-order; ii) scope; iii) sentence intonation; iv) lexicalization patterns; and v) cross-linguistic variation.

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