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**Pragmatic markers at the periphery and discourse prominence:
The case of English *of course***

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Abstract

This chapter argues that position interacts with discourse prominence in the development of pragmatic markers. A case study of the English marker *of course* traces its historical development over Late Modern English to its present-day usage at both left (LP) and right (RP) peripheries. It is argued that *of course* splits along informational lines: *of course-1* becomes more backgrounded while *of course-2* bears focus. At LP *of course-1* acquires a presentational function while at RP it marks its host as a comment on a previous idea, in a hypotactic discourse structure. The emergence of information-packaging functions may be seen as a further grammaticalization of the PM.

Keywords

pragmatic marker, discourse prominence, periphery, grammaticalization, discourse structure

1 Introduction

While the functions of many pragmatic markers (PMs, also known as pragmatic particles or discourse markers) have been well studied within pragmatics, less attention has been paid to their positional and information-packaging aspects, due in part perhaps to expressions with “pragmatic function” being considered “outside the syntax” and positionally mobile. PMs

have tended to be characterized primarily in terms of pragmatic or discourse function. Where interest has focused on more formal, structural properties, PMs have been defined negatively, in terms of being optional or not belonging to sentence grammar. For Brinton (2008, 1), for example, “[a] pragmatic marker is defined as a phonologically short item that is not syntactically connected to the rest of the clause (i.e. is parenthetical), and has little or no referential meaning but serves pragmatic or procedural purposes” (see also Schourup 1999, 234, Heine 2013, 1209). No consensus exists on whether they form an empirically-grounded category and in practice identification continues to rest on discourse-pragmatic and/or ostensive definitions.

This chapter suggests that the position and the information-packaging functions of English pragmatic markers can interact and are therefore best looked at together. It is suggested that the diachronic development of such markers is partially driven by the information packaging of the discourses in which they occur. The aim of the study is to try to identify these interactions for the marker *of course*, tracing its trajectory through adverbial connector and modal adverb to pragmatic marker. Many English PMs (such as *actually*, *anyway*, *really*) are found at both left periphery (LP) and right periphery (RP). Other types of expression that share this characteristic are comment clauses (deverbal pragmatic markers) and many kinds of evaluative and modal sentence adverb. According to Lenker (2010, 202), use at the RP of adverbial connectors is “a comparatively recent syntactic change in English”. Biber et al (1999) found more “stance adverbials” in final position in Conversation than in written registers, suggesting that this position is part of ongoing change (see also Hancil et al. 2015). Whether this trend results from functional specialization or reflects a wider syntactic change in progress or is due to some other factors remains to be shown. The study suggests that in the case of *of course*, which occurs at both peripheries and also as a standalone expression, there is evidence that recurrent discourse relational patterns have resulted in some positional specialization.

Section 2 surveys recent issues in pragmatic marker position, with reference to English and outlines the type of information packaging that markers can involve. Position will be discussed in terms of peripheral attachments (Section 2.1) and information packaging will be discussed in terms of relative discourse prominence and grounding (Section 2.2). The case study of *of course* is presented in Sections 3 (Late Modern English) and 4 (Present-day English; PDE). The findings are discussed in Section 5 and Section 6 concludes.

2 Position, prominence and English pragmatic markers

2.1 Pragmatic markers and position

PMs must be related in some way to a linguistic unit of some sort and their placement in the linear discourse is constrained by that relation. *Position* is used for the purposes of this study in a wide sense, to mean where, in relation to any type or size of unit, a given pragmatic marker occurs. This volume concerns pragmatic markers at the *peripheries* and this subsection addresses what is meant here by peripheral position in the context of English PMs.

There are at least two ways in which the term *periphery* is used in the literature in connection with PMs. For approaches maintaining that PMs have no syntactic status, PMs

can be said to attach to utterances, so that *periphery* refers to the beginning or end of an utterance (see discussion in Beeching and Detges 2014). According to Haselow (2015, 160–161), for example, “[t]he periphery of an utterance is a conversational space surrounding a structural unit (e.g. a phrase or a clause) ... [T]he LP and RP do not host the first or last element of a structural unit, but represent supplementary slots that are structurally isolated from the reference unit, being loosely appended to it”. Haselow (2016, 387), however, prefers the term *field*: “A field is [...] not defined as a structural slot.” In other approaches, *periphery* refers to a defined position (a *slot*) relative to a syntactic unit, typically a clause. Traugott (2015, 127), for instance, refers to LP and RP as “clause-initial and clause-final slots” and convincingly argues, with evidence from language change, for a model of grammar in which there are no sharp boundaries between adjuncts and PMs. In similar vein, Lohmann and Koops (2016, 421) argue for a continuum between PMs and independent utterances such as *yes*.

Overall, there is no consensus in the literature on the quality of the relation attributed to the word *periphery*. *Clause periphery*, usually operationalized as LP vs. RP, may suggest a *high* syntactic position (cf. *periphery* in cartographic syntax). Other positions where English PMs are found are clause-medial, after the first clause constituent and after the verb. *Medial* refers here to the pre-Verb/post-Auxiliary slot, which is the default position for English circumstantial adverbs (see Section 3.2.2). LP and RP refer here to the front or rear attachment of a PM to its host. This is very often a clause but it is not necessarily a clause as will be seen in Section 4. Nothing in this study hinges on a distinction between *LP/RP* and *initial position/final position*, which are the terms used by many other researchers of PMs.

2.2 Pragmatic markers and discourse prominence

In the literature, a distinction is customarily made between *information structure* at sentential level and *discourse structure* at suprasentential level.¹ Information structure deals with such features as topic-comment structure, given-new information, grounding relations, focus assignment and so on. Discourse structure caters for coherence (rhetorical) relations, discourse prominence relations, discourse topic management, cross-sentential reference and so on. The distinction reflects a particular concept of the sentence that is not always relevant to conversation. The two areas overlap, insofar as both areas are concerned with how Speaker constructs discourse to achieve her goals, managing Hearer's attention by encoding entities and situations so that he can understand how each element contributes to the line of argument, to the construal she intends him to recreate. Our approach to *of course* does not assume a boundary between sentence-level and discourse-level information packaging but rather a gradient. It will be seen that *of course* can participate in information packaging at different structural levels in similar ways.

The notion of prominence can be applied to different levels of linguistic structure from prosody to discourse relations. It is related to attention in that, in ongoing discourse, a speaker uses markers of prominence (prosodic stress, thematic role assignment, discourse structuring at all levels, etc.) to indicate where relatively more or less attention is to be focused. Prominence has been described as a ranking between linguistic entities of the same type

¹ See Jasinskaja et al. (2004) for an overview of research on these two currents in information packaging research.

(Jasinskaja et al. 2015, 134) whereby one entity is more prominent than another. While prominence may be conventionalized in particular structures, it is susceptible to context-dependent shift (Himmelmann and Primus 2015, 43–44). The linguistic devices chosen by speakers serve to signal the relative prominence of elements at a given point in the discourse (Jasinskaja et al. 2015, 134).

Prominence at the level of discourse coherence relations is comparable to the notion of nuclearity developed in Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), as discussed in Jasinskaja et al. (2015, 146–147). RST posits that many coherence relations (such as cause, condition, evidence, etc.) are inherently asymmetrical in that one member of the pair (the satellite) is ancillary to the other (the nucleus): “in any multi-unit text, certain portions realize the central goals of the writer, while others realize goals which are supplementary or ancillary to the central goals” (Matthiessen and Thompson 1988, 289; see also Mann and Thompson 1987, Taboada and Mann 2006).

PMs can signal the relationship between one information unit and another, helping the hearer to identify the goals and the line of argument of the speaker. This role of PMs in structuring information is widely acknowledged (Modicom and Duplâtre 2020 provide a cross-linguistic overview) but its links with position for those PMs occurring at both LP and RP remains under-researched.

Section 3 next looks at the recent historical development of *of course* that led to the PDE situation, which is the subject of Section 4.

3 *Of course* in Late Modern English

3.1 Data sources

Pragmatic particles are present in both written and spoken language but their functions and distribution differ between spontaneous dialogic spoken language and pre-planned written language. Moreover, in language change spoken language tends to lead, written language being more conservative. The diachronic study of *of course* that follows is based on data from the Old Bailey Corpus (Hitchcock et al. 2015, Huber et al. 2016), which consists of samples of transcripts from court proceedings at the Old Bailey over the period 1720s to 1913. As with most historical corpora, it is not a balanced corpus: men and the higher social classes are over-represented; the topics are random; the questioning of witnesses is a very special genre; and the transcripts inevitably lose the detail of the spoken word. But the discourse provides as good an approximation to spontaneous spoken dialogic language as one is likely to get for the period. It is estimated that about 85% of the text from the 1730s onwards is transcribed direct speech (Huber 2007). This makes it not only a useful source for identifying early occurrences of new usages but also relatively suitable for comparison with spontaneous, spoken present-day English. The examples drawn from this corpus are followed by “OBC” and the year or decade. C is used to indicate speech by a member of the Court, W for those who give witness, including expert witnesses, other witnesses and defendants. Punctuation, being variable and potentially misleading, is not shown in the examples, other than dashes and question marks. Data drawn from the OBC are summarized in Table 1.

Period	<i>of course</i> n=	Period	<i>of course</i> n=
1730-1739	1	1820-1829	13
1740-1749	0	1830-1839	64
1750-1759	1	1840-1849	55
1760-1769	0	1850-1859	78
1770-1779	21	1860-1869	125
1780-1789	33	1870-1879	111
1790-1799	72	1880-1889	69
1800-1809	58	1890-1899	71
1810-1819	20	1900-1913	150

Table 1: Data from the OBC

3.2 *Of course* in the Old Bailey corpus

3.2.1 Meanings of *of course*

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *course* appears in the spatial sense of ‘way/route/path’ (*I directed my course towards Temple-bar*, OBC 1760s) and the metaphorical extension of path, ‘choice/option’ (*what shall I do? what course shall I take?*, OBC 1730s) but more often it occurs in a temporal sense. In late eighteenth-century usage, *course* conveys a durative or sequential notion in the construction *the course of* + TIME EXPRESSION (*in the course of five weeks*, OBC 1760s) or + DURATIVE EVENT (*in the course of my attendance*, OBC 1750s). *Course* might be glossed as ‘flow of habitual, normal events’, as in (1); it therefore often conveys an expectation notion, expectations being anticipation of what can be predicted or is highly probable.

- (1) what is your **course** at the Bank where gentlemen keep cash with you? (OBC, 1763)

Course is rarely modified by an adjective but when it is, the most frequent are *common*, *general*, *usual*, *regular* and *ordinary* (e.g. *in the general course of your Business*, OBC 1750s). All these senses persist in PDE. *Of course* in this ‘normally/habitually’ sense also postmodifies nouns and this too persists in PDE in the idiomatic expression *a matter of course* (by contrast, *order of course*, *transaction of course*, etc. are now obsolete).

An indication of when *of course* was felt to have adverbialized is provided by Johnson’s Dictionary, which, in the fourth edition (1773), shows *of course* as a lexeme. The citations and senses from the first edition are maintained but now the senses are presented as pertaining to *of course* rather than to *course*. The two senses that Johnson attributes to both ‘of course’ (1st edition) and *of course* (4th edition) are ‘by settled rule’ and ‘by consequence’. These two senses will now be looked at in turn, followed by a look at the emergence of *of course* as an assertive response particle.

By settled rule. Johnson’s ‘by settled rule’ sense of *of course* incorporates the sense of *course* described above as ‘flow of habitual, normal events’. This *of course* can be glossed as ‘according to established practice’, ‘normally, usually’, and therefore occurs in durative or

iterative contexts. The unambiguous cases of this usage in the corpus data all refer to habitual practice and *of course* occurs initially (2a) or finally (2b) and occasionally elsewhere.

- (2) a. <C> I take it to be impossible for you to recollect the directions of parcels but from your book?
<W> **of course** I have an account in my book that I can rely on (OBC, 1802)
- b. <C> upon letters being delivered to him what was he to do?
<W> to put them into the bag **of course** (OBC, 1804)

This usage *of course* as a circumstantial adverb is now obsolete. In the corpus data it dwindles to 5% of occurrences by the first half of the nineteenth century, though the nature of the courtroom genre may be responsible for the predominance of the inferential *of course* that is discussed next.

Resultative and inferential of course. If one event is regularly followed by another event in a sequence, the second event, if the context permits, is inferred to result from the first and a temporal adverb can acquire cause-consequence implicatures (cf. *then* and *follow that* and equivalents cross-linguistically). This must have given rise to Johnson's 'by consequence' sense, i.e. resultative *of course*, which is compatible with punctual and telic contexts. In (3) the obstruction of the vessels is followed by, and is understood as the cause of, the being strangled.

- (3) <W> by pressing the Gullet the Vessels would be obstructed and she would be strangled **of course**. (OBC, 1735)

Example (3) illustrates a physical cause (event p causes event q) where the result is a punctual bounded event. From real-world causation (p causes q) to mental causation (p causes speaker to infer q; i.e. to reason *if p, then q*) is a small step, from having knowledge of a situation to inferring that situation by reasoning. In the courtroom questioning of witnesses, a great deal of inference is on display.

From the late eighteenth century, *of course* collocates with causal and inferential markers (*then, as, therefore, must, because, -ing* premises, conditionals with *if..then* and with *or* or *else*). This is exemplified in (4), with a conditional (4a), a causal subordinator (4b), a participial reason-clause (4c) and another connector plus epistemic *must* (4d). These collocations would reinforce the association of *of course* with consequence and inference.

- (4) a. <C> **if** my other learned brother should unite in opinion with me the trial will of course come on (OBC, 1770s)
- b. <C> **as** you know them so well **of course** they knew you very well
<W> Yes (OBC, 1783)
- c. <C> Yours **being** a banking-house **of course** he had opportunities of being dishonest..? (OBC, 1798)
- d. <C> the boy was to account to you upon memory for the delivery of flour quartern loaves half quartern loaves and rolls?
<W> yes

<C> **therefore of course** he must say he received the money from some one (OBC, 1808)

In examples in (4), *of course* attaches in every case to prominent information units (underlined) representing the main line of argumentation and communicative goals of the speaker. In (4a), (4b) and (4c), the prominence relation is grammatically encoded by syntactic subordination of the less prominent idea.² In (4d) it is arguably encoded or implicated in the connectors *therefore* and *of course*, which simultaneously code or implicate causality and prominence relation.³

By the end of the eighteenth century, *of course* in the inferential sense is repeatedly found in the courtroom questioning to mean ‘it can be inferred from the foregoing that’ and might be glossed in PDE by inferential ‘so’, as in (5).

- (5) <C> you have been used to a great many horses and have seen a great many?
<W> yes
<C> **of course** you know that a white leg before or behind is a particular mark?
<W> when people take particular notice of it it is there is no doubt of it
<C> how long had you the horse in your custody?
<W> six nights
<C> **of course** you had an opportunity of seeing him many times? (OBC, 1791)

Of course here is a modal adverb expressing what Palmer (2001, 24) refers to as “Deductive epistemic modality” and it can be applied to any event type.⁴ This represents a shift from the physical plane to the epistemic plane (Sweetser 1990). *Of course* has thus undergone subjectification of meaning resulting in a new use alongside the older uses.⁵ Example (5) illustrates the discourse prominence pattern co-occurring with *of course*: C builds up an argument, based on W’s answers, in a pattern of Evidence-Inference. C’s argumentation consists of forming pairs (5’), linked by *of course*, where the Inference is prominent (underlined here) in relation to the Evidence.

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- 2 Identifying prominence relations between a main clause and a subordinate clause may seem to run counter to the idea above that prominence is a relation between two elements of the same type and is to be distinguished from dependency relations (Himmelmann and Primus 2014, 45–46 exclude dependency relations from prominence, though their discussion does not concern multi-clausal sentences.) But there is overlap, with no clear-cut distinction between connectives and subordinators, for instance, which do similar work. Indeed, Matthiessen and Thompson (1988, 301) hypothesize that clause-combining such as syntactic subordination arises as a grammaticalization of prominence relations.
- 3 Some frameworks, such as Rhetorical Structure Theory, conflate prominence relations (“nuclearity”) and coherence relations, so that each coherence relation has an inherent prominence relation. Other frameworks separate coherence from prominence.
- 4 Palmer (2001, 29) notes that “deductive” markers are both epistemic and evidential; they convey both speaker degree of confidence in the veracity of the idea and the inferential nature of the evidence. Evidentiality is defined notionally and subsumed under the broad definition of modality.
- 5 Langacker (1991, 215) defines “subjectification” as “a semantic shift or extension in which an entity originally construed objectively comes to receive a more subjective construal”.

(5')	Evidence	Link	Inference
	<i>you have been used to a great many horses ..</i>	<i>of course</i>	<u><i>you know that a white leg ..is a particular mark</i></u>
	<i>you had the horse in your custody six nights</i>	<i>of course</i>	<u><i>you had an opportunity of seeing him many times</i></u>

One test for discourse prominence is the removal in turn of each member of the pair; removal of the less prominent member will result in a more coherent discourse than removal of the prominent member. Prominent elements represent the main line of argumentation or the main line of topicality and better reflect the goals of the speaker, as can be seen from the Inference column of (5'); it is the inferences that are relevant to the case that C is building. *Of course* finds itself now fronting prominent information units and may therefore come to be associated with a focusing function.

From the mid nineteenth century, *of course* starts to occur in a different causal configuration: a sequence where the assertion of a situation is followed by the cause of it, as in (6a) and (6b), or a claim is followed by the evidence for it, as in (6c).

- (6) a. <C> were you sober?
 <W> I was not quite sober **of course** because I had been drinking (OBC, 1852)
- b. <W> the vapours were very nauseous and **of course** this was increased on their being stirred (OBC, 1857)
- c. <W> **of course** it was the coachman's fault there was plenty of room for him to have turned round and gone into Broad-street (OBC, 1861)

Of course is still attached to the prominent information units (underlined in 6') but it has lost its resultative meaning: it can no longer be glossed as 'as a result'. And it no longer links two units, as (6') makes clear, but can only mean 'naturally' or serve to emphasize.

(6')	Situation or claim	Link	Cause or evidence
	<u><i>I was not quite sober</i></u> <i>of course</i>	<i>because</i>	<i>I had been drinking</i>
	<i>of course</i> <u><i>this was increased</i></u>	<i>on</i>	<i>their being stirred</i>
	<i>of course</i> <u><i>it was the coachman's fault</i></u>	∅	<i>there was plenty of room for him to have turned round..</i>

This development suggests that the association of *of course* with the resultant situation or inference, generally the more prominent information in a cause-result or evidence-inference pair, persisted while the connective function faded. In the contexts of (6), instead of CAUSE -

of course - OUTCOME (the temporal order of events, where *of course* expresses ‘as a result’), there is OUTCOME - *of course* - CAUSE or *of course* - OUTCOME - CAUSE. This suggests a reanalysis of [p] [*of course*] [q] whereby *of course* comes to be more closely associated with the outcome: [p] [*of course*-q], leaving the cause to move or be omitted. Without mention of the cause of the situation or the evidence for the claim, *of course* suggests an unspoken justification, shared by Hearer, that it is not necessary to articulate, and thus becomes a marker of a justified assertion, as in (7).

- (7) <W> I took it [a 5s piece] out of his hand and saw immediately that it was bad -- I said “**of course** you are aware that this is a bad one?” -- he said “no I am not” (OBC, 1854)

Of course has become a modal adverb with an expectational or assumptive (Palmer 2001, 28–31) sense, where a state of affairs is assumed by the speaker on the evidence of contextual, shared or general world knowledge.

In the light of vague uses, it seems likely that for at least some speakers the ‘habitually’ sense is assimilated to the ‘naturally/necessarily’ sense (from inferential *of course*) from the mid nineteenth century. Use in *if* and *when* constructions tends to be compatible with both a resultative and a circumstantial (‘as a rule, habitually’) interpretation, as in (8).

- (8) <W> when we have parcels to send home **of course** we ask our customers where they live (OBC, 1836)

Assertive response particle. Response particles, also known as polarity particles, are expressions like *yes* and *no* that serve as standard responses to polar questions and as agreement or disagreement markers. They can be used as complete utterances. The first occurrences in the data of *of course* as an assertive response particle are from the turn of the nineteenth century. The earliest are in the causal and inferential contexts discussed above, where *of course* accompanies the outcome and can be glossed as ‘so’ from the notion that the outcome logically ensues, as in (9).

- (9) <C> you know the prisoner at the bar?
<W> yes he was a clerk in our house to take care of bills for acceptance and numbering bills for acceptance this bill has the acceptance of Mr. Cox upon it
<C> and **therefore** must have been in your house?
<W> **of course** (OBC, 1798)

Assertive response *of course* is an epistemic expression, used to confirm and emphasize the epistemic status of the previous unit or to reverse its polarity; it references the epistemic status of the previous unit.

Some evidence that this usage might have become fashionable in some quarters, but rare in the conservative discourse of the court, is found in an 1850s comment on the expression (10), where being publicans does not follow from the foregoing. (There may be irony on the part of both Court and Witness here.)

- (10) <C> therefore you are pretty confident that he called in three sub-contractors did they happen also to be publicans?
 <W> yes of course
 <C> that seems to be a phrase at Rye “ **of course** ” (OBC, 1850s)

In the nineteenth century, then, *of course* as an assertive response particle emerges. It may have arisen as an echo of *of course* in the previous turn, in a question or assumption and/or from a gradual weakening of the inferential sense in favor of the ‘naturally’ sense.

On the evidence of the OBC, temporal sequence gives rise by implicature to resultative and inferential connector *of course*. The connector status of *of course* fades as the inferential sense gives way to the ‘necessarily/naturally’ meaning. The ‘habitually/normally’ usage becomes fossilized in *a matter of course* but perhaps also assimilated to the ‘naturally’ usage. At the turn of the nineteenth century, on the evidence of the corpus, assertive *of course* emerged, in dialogic contexts. It continues to be used in PDE exclusively as a response particle in interaction; in written text it occurs only in certain dialogic-type argumentation.

3.2.2 Position of ‘*of course*’

In the late sixteenth century, medial position (before the verb and after *be* and the auxiliary if there is one) was consolidated as the default position for English adverbs (Breivik and Swan 1994, Nevalainen 1994, Rissanen 1999, 268). Otherwise they are final or initial, like phrasal adverbials. Once *of course* has adverbialized in the second half of the eighteenth century, all adverb positions are found. In (11) the witness uses circumstantial *of course* in three positions in the space of a few turns. The three occurrences correspond to Johnson’s ‘by settled rule’ sense (the first may be ambiguous or be dual-analysis between ‘the usual file’ or ‘as usual’) with resultative implicatures from the temporal sequencing indicated by the *when*-clauses.

- (11) <Q> where was the ticket put that you gave for the particular notes
 <A> it was put on the file **of course**.
 ...
 <A> there is an office called the drawing office - every gentleman that keeps cash at the bank has a book of debtor and creditor - when he pays any money it is **of course** entered by a proper officer - it is common to draw drafts upon printed checks which we give them
 <Q> how are the checks delivered out?
 <A> we have them in books a thousand in a book which runs alphabetically - when one book is out **of course** we begin the next letter (OBC, 1772)

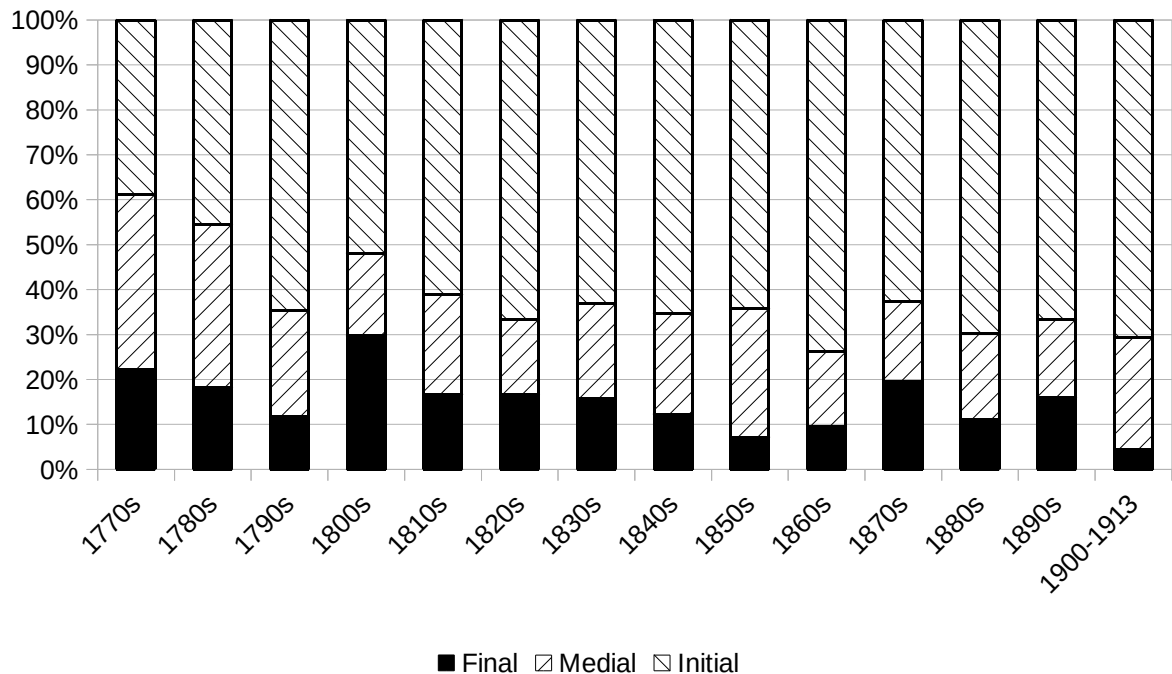
Likewise, inferential *of course* occurs in different positions (12), though rarely medially.

- (12) a. <C> have you never had any quarrel with White ?
 <W> not a word
 <C> **then** he never turned you out of doors **of course** ? (OBC, 1797)
 b. <C> had you any conversation with that postman?

- <W> none that I recollect further than giving him a shilling to pay the penny
- <C:>you were some minutes with him **then of course**?
- <W> yes waiting for change (OBC, 1804)
- c. <C> do you know Mrs. Harris?
- <W> yes she is my next-door neighbour
- <C> **then of course** you have had some conversation with her upon this subject?
- <W> no (OBC, c.1800)

By the early nineteenth century, *of course* has expanded to a range of related usages and in several positions, though initial position is by now dominant (Figure 1).

Fig. 1. Positions of 'of course' in the Old Bailey data



Jane Austen's usage of *of course* in her letters, which are colloquial in style and date from the turn of the nineteenth century (1798-1817) include the resultative sense (13) and the 'naturally' sense (14) in positions: pre-V/post-aux (the default adverb position) (14a), post-V (14b), pre-clausal (14c), and post-clausal (14d).

- (13) They say that she has always been remarkable for the propriety of her behaviour, distinguishing her far above the general class of town misses, & rendering her **of course** very unpopular among them. (1800)
- (14) a. "if there is any party I wish to join, Perrot will take out a ticket for me." Such an offer I shall **of course** decline. (Austen 1805)

- b. We write also **of course** to Godmersham & Brompton. Adieu my dearest Frank. (Austen 1805)
- c. 'The Papers Left by Mrs. Fisher' is very good. - **of course**, one guesses something. (Austen 1814)
- d. He is getting very near our own age, for we do not grow older **of course**. (Austen 1816)

Clause-final position is rare throughout the data but occurs for both the inferential and habitual senses. The latest example in the corpus of habitual *of course* is shown in (15); again there may be ambiguity between 'regularly' and 'a regular reduction'.

- (15) Mr. Lynch pays me 10 s. a week for looking after the place and he makes me a reduction **of course** — sometimes he would deduct the rent and sometimes I would give it to him (OBC,1893)

The expansion of *of course* results in the nineteenth century in a continuum of temporal and epistemic usages including habitual, resultative, inferential and expectational with considerable inter-speaker variation. And an affirmative response particle emerges. In the PDE data, *of course* can clearly be seen to have split into two main uses; one confined to responses, as an isolate or at LP, the other the modal adverb.

4 *Of course* in PDE

4.1 *Of course* as a pragmatic marker

The data on Present-day English comes primarily from the Spoken British National Corpus 2014 (Love et al. 2017), which consists of transcribed spontaneous conversation in varieties of British English recorded in the 2010s. Audio files for this corpus were not available at the time of writing. A major drawback of this data, therefore, is the absence of prosodic information, which has to be inferred. The shortened form of *of course*, without *of*, is not included in the dataset used for figures and tables but is mentioned below and in Section 5. (A random sample of 50 suggests that about 6% of occurrences are without 'of', most of them response particles.) All examples unless otherwise indicated come from BNC2014 and are followed by the BNC2014 text code.

Of course is categorized by Quirk et al (1985) as subjunct, disjunct and conjunct, reflecting the range of use that this frequent marker has in PDE. There have been a number of studies of *of course* from a pragmatic angle: as a pragmatic particle, modal adverb or discourse marker. The various functions and usage of *of course* in PDE have been addressed (Holmes 1988, Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer 2004), as well as the role of prosody in relation to these functions (Wichmann et al. 2010) and the evolution of the expression from PP to modal adverb to pragmatic particle (Lewis 2003). But less attention has been paid to either the shifting positions of the expression or to the interaction between evolving functions and discourse structure.

Quirk et al (1985, 8.140–141) identify “concessive” and “resultative” meanings for *of course*. For Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer (2004), these are “contextual meanings” of *of course*: “[c]oncession and result are implicatures which, through frequent occurrence, ... have become stabilised and coded as pragmatic meanings.” But as evidenced by the diachronic data, this may be misleading. The (coded) resultative sense was pervasive in the late eighteenth century but it has waned and it is now all but obsolete. Although *of course* continues to occur in resultative contexts, the resultative meaning relies on another expression such as *then* or *so*. The resultative is reduced to a contextual inference, having been reanalyzed as such. *Of course* has undergone what Croft (2000, 160) describes as “metanalysis”, whereby “a contextual (‘pragmatic’) property of the meaning is reanalyzed as an inherent (‘semantic’) property of the meaning, and a related inherent property is reanalyzed as a contextual one”. By contrast, the concessive use is recent and not yet coded (Lewis 2003).⁶ The distinction is important not only for studies of the directionality of semantic change but also for our understanding of synchronic polysemy and variation in PDE, for which a panchronic approach is necessary.

Dictionary definitions concur on two main usages of *of course* in PDE: Collins Dictionary, for example, lists them as “a. as expected, naturally; b. (*sentence substitute*) certainly, definitely”. This division is apparent in our PDE data. A random sample of 1,100 occurrences of *of course* was obtained from BNC2014, of which 1036 were suitable for analysis, and these were categorized as ‘Assertive *of course*’ or ‘Expectational *of course*’. Assertive *of course* is illustrated in (16), where the *of course* meaning is the main point (underlined) of B’s utterance, which is to agree with and strengthen A’s claim by reasserting it.

- (16) <A> I could just let it grow you know
 of course you could yeah (ST26)

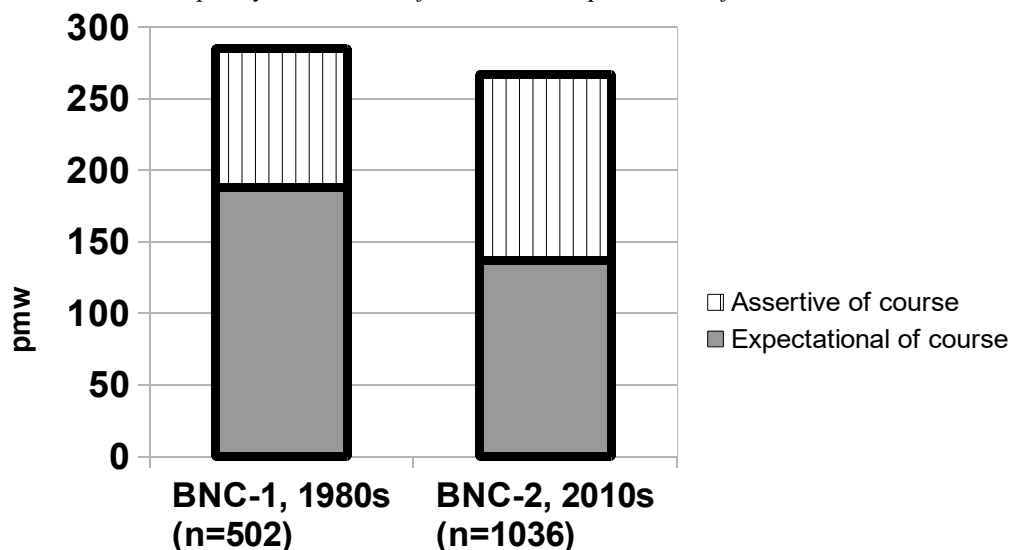
In Expectational uses, the *of course* meaning is backgrounded relative to its host. In (17), the host (*you’ve got the brush strokes*) is the new information and the main idea (underlined).

- (17) <A> yes they are lovely are’nt they?
 they’re gorgeous **and of course** you’ve got the brush strokes you can see the brush strokes (SFYX)

The few occurrences that could only have been disambiguated by the prosody were coded as ambiguous. Figure 2 shows that the recent overall decline in the frequency of *of course* (1980s–2010s) is due to reduced frequency of Expectational *of course*, while Assertive *of course* has increased. Overall, each usage accounts for roughly half of occurrences of *of course*.

⁶ In Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer’s (2004) terminology, “pragmatic meaning”, since they describe it as “coded”, must refer to non-referential meaning. We prefer to reserve the term “pragmatic” for contextual meanings, i.e. utterance meaning, not coded meaning.

Figure 2: Relative frequency of Assertive *of course* and Expectational *of course* in 1980s and 2010s



4.2 *Of course* in PDE: functions and contextual uses

This section looks first at the differences between Assertive and Expectational *of course* and then at the different contextual uses of Expectational *of course*.

Assertive and Expectational *of course* differ in prosodic realization: while Assertive *of course* carries pitch accent and is the focus of its information unit, Expectational *of course* generally does not (*cf.* Wichmann et al. 2010). As mentioned above, a drawback of the PDE corpus is the absence of audio data. However, the structural differences between the two types of *of course* are relatively clear-cut so that, providing enough context is available, there are few unclear cases.

Assertive *of course* is a response particle.⁷ It always occurs in response (agreeing or disagreeing) to what has just been said and codes polarity: it expresses strong affirmation (*of course*) or negation (*of course not*). It is regularly preceded in the data by *oh, well, yes/yeah, no* and/or followed by *yes/yeah, no*, or PRONOUN+AUX. It can occur as an isolated response particle (the “sentence substitute” of Collins’ definition) (18a), preceding a verbal ellipsis or pro-verb (18b) or full repeat of the previous idea (18c) or contradicting a previous idea (18d). It forms a single prosodic unit with what follows, carries pitch accent and is the focus of the information unit.

- (18) a. <A> yeah that's good
 will you be making them?
 <C> **of course**
 <A> I'll ...
 <D> they're homemade (S47C)
- b. <A> ... the trouble is there's so much rubbish on the internet as well
 well **of course** there is

⁷ Some researchers include response particles in the category of pragmatic markers; others retain two categories. For the purposes of this study we follow the second approach.

- <A> cos you know you get every [...] Tom Dick and Harry (STB7)
- c. <A> what does she want? Does she still go for ducks?
 of course she still has pet ducks this is <Name> we're talking about (SMGY)
- d. <A> no well he can't he said he can't walk now he used to walk every day
 what do you mean he can't walk? **of course** he can walk
<A> he isn't good on his legs you know (SHGE)

In (18), *of course* is in focus in each case (as reflected in the prosody) and carries prominence in relation to the status of the previous information unit (it involves a rhetorically stronger assertion). The most frequent function in the corpus data of Assertive *of course* is agreement with the interlocutor as in (18b).

Expectational *of course* reduces illocutionary force, suggesting Hearer already knows or supposes or will not be surprised by what Speaker is saying. In most occurrences it has an underlying hedging function. In addition, *of course* is sometimes used to convey irony and also occurs in concessive constructions.

Irony. *Of course* is used at LP or RP to express irony, in particular the idea that the natural order is for things to go slightly wrong. The ironic use is illustrated in (19). In (19a) the less prominent idea (in brackets) is in the scope of *of course* and the prominent one (the main line of argument) is underlined; in (19b) *of course* introduces a main idea (with a resultative implicature).

- (19) a. and he was just determined to sort it but [he never did **of course**] and it and it's still up there unfinished and so unsorted (S2UT)
- b. at one point there was this place they shout at you when you 're on your bike **and of course** you go duh and fall off your bike (S68E)

Concession. Concession is an argumentational strategy whereby Speaker concedes as valid a claim that might appear to be at odds with or to detract from the claim she wishes to focus Hearer's attention on, then emphasizes the validity of her own claim. Concessives are therefore by nature asymmetrical, comprising a conceded, backgrounded idea *p* that the speaker contrasts with a potentially incompatible idea *q* to which she wants to give prominence. Concession *of course* occurs mainly in the patterns: *p of course, but q* and *of course p, but q*. *Of course* is not a fully-fledged concession marker; it only functions as such in conjunction with a contrastive connective such as *but* marking the more prominent member of the concession pair (20).

- (20) a. <A> so <Name> wouldn't've been able to drive so quite restrictive (for her
 oh
<A> I mean [they had drivers **of course**] you know **but still**
 well somebody drives you around yes
<A> yes it's not the same is it ? (S56S)
- b. <A> so now when erm when I have anybody late at work
 mm
<A> erm I mean [you have to allow them so long **of course**]

 yeah
 <A> **but** then I'll always send a text firstly and say is everything okay? I'm just a bit worried I haven't heard from you yet (S64H)

In the second concession pattern, it is at RP that *of course* marks the less prominent member of the coherence relation pair: in (21) it precedes the conceded idea.

(21) I genuinely don't think it happens in England now .. **of course** [it might happen sometimes] **but** I think we've got a really good system (SYUR)

Hedging. Hedging is a positive face-saving or consensus-building politeness strategy. Fraser (2010, 15) defines “hedging” as “a rhetorical strategy which attenuates either the full semantic value of a particular expression ... or the full force of a speech act”. *Of course* can be said to fulfill the latter function of reducing illocutionary force when it is employed to suggest that the speaker is not so much informing the hearer as evoking some common ground or shared experience as in (22). This is so even when the hearer is unlikely to be familiar with what the speaker is telling; implying common ground where there is none is a form of politeness. The common ground in (22a) is the knowledge shared by A and B that at that time of night there is no traffic. The common ground in (22b) is the view shared by A and B that gardens and gardening are nice.⁸

(22) a. <A> it's only of the order of twice the time to get to <Place>
 mm
 <A> slightly more but
 yeah I mean
 <A> and **of course** there is no traffic at this time of night
 no (SZPS)

b. <A> I like gardening yeah
 yeah nice it's nice to go out in the garden **of course** isn't it?
 <A> it is nice ..it is nice it's good exercise too .. I started some pumpkin plants growing
 oh you like pumpkins do you ? (S56S)

Hedging *of course* as seen in (22) occurs at LP or at RP. In (22a) *and of course* introduces a new idea (and helps A to keep the floor that B seemed to want to claim with *I mean* ..). In (22b) *of course* + *isn't it* ends a comment on the current topic (B's comment on A's prior utterance) and cedes the floor: B's goal seems to be not to introduce anything new but to encourage A to drive the conversation and choose the topic at this point.

English is rarely described as having modal particles but Aijmer (2013, 96–101) distinguishes between *of course* the discourse marker, in the concessive use, and *of course* the modal particle, in the shared-knowledge and background-marking use: “*Of course* as a modal particle is both consensus-seeking and rhetorical.” (Aijmer 2013, 100) She further suggests a correlation between position and function: “the left-detached position (marked by commas) is

⁸ A reviewer suggests that (22b) is like (16), an example of Assertive of course. But assertive *of course* in the context of (22b) could only be ‘*of course [you do]*’.

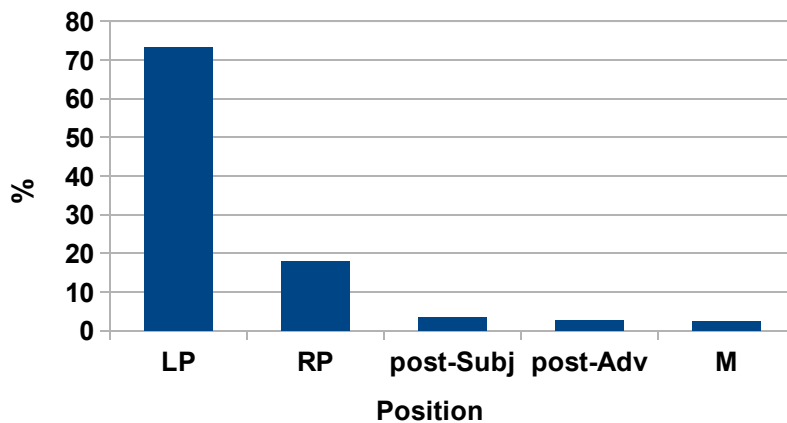
reserved for the discourse marker the modal particle is integrated in the syntactic structure and is non-initial. The modal particle *of course* can also have end position (at the end of the clause).” (Aijmer 2013, 101) This approach is only partially compatible with the evidence from the BNC2014 spoken data. We have distinguished instead between Assertive *of course* and Expectational *of course*. Assertive *of course* is restricted to dialogue. It is restricted to the LP or occurs as a complete utterance. For Expectational *of course*, it has been seen that there is no clear-cut correlation between position and contextual usage. The next sub-section suggests that its position aligns not so much with its potential polysemy as with information packaging: topic management and discourse prominence relations.

4.3 *Of course* in PDE at LP and RP

Compared with the Old Bailey data (Figure 2), the most striking observation is that initial position remains by far the most frequent, while medial position has declined and final position is holding up, but arguably with a modified function as discussed below.

Holmes (1988) found that in her spoken New Zealand data initial position was by far the most frequent, while final position was rare. Wichmann et al. (2010), working with ICE-GB spoken data found just over half of occurrences in initial position, 36% in medial and only 13.5% in final position. Our data show a similar tendency at RP (13.4% of Expectational *of course*) but the figures are not directly comparable, because of the way we separate Assertive *of course* (49% of the sample), which is isolated or initial, from Expectational *of course* (51% of the sample). The positional distribution of Expectational *of course* in the spoken data is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Positional distribution of Expectational of course (n=530)



It was seen in Section 4.2 that in irony, concession and hedging uses, *of course* can occur at LP or RP. The difference between the two positions may have less to do with the different modal functions and more with speaker goals and what the speaker wants to present as main or ancillary to the line of argument. Our hypothesis is that *of course* at LP (as in 22a) has a presentational function to introduce a main idea, while at RP (as in 22b) it marks its host as being not a main goal of the speaker or as being an aside to the main line of argument. Hosts of Expectational *of course* at LP tend to carry prominent ideas whose deletion would render

the discourse incoherent, while those at RP carry ancillary information that could be omitted without destroying the main thread of the discourse.

In many contexts where Speaker is providing new ideas rather than evoking shared common ground, *of course* can be only weakly expectational. The pattern at LP [*connective*] *of course* makes sense in these contexts as introducing a new point, a new idea or a new topic. It functions as a presentative, to focus attention on the upcoming new idea. This is the case in (23), where speaker A clearly wants to talk about their old school and shifts the topic back to it with *but of course*, after a digression introduced by B. It is also the case in (24), where speaker waits for feedback before resuming with a new point.

- (23) <A> but yeah me going to <Place-A> was a real eye opener because I'd never .. I saw a side of life that
 <Name> went there didn't he?
<A> no he went to <Place-B>
 <Name>?
<A> yeah I think you will find he went to <Place-B>
 oh I thought it was <Place-A>
<A> I will check it when I get home
 yeah
<A> **but of course** the the year that I was there erm was quite incredible..
(S8NX)
- (24) <A> yeah they might have to be moving to Florida shortly mightn't they?
 yeah
<C> oh dear oh dear
<A> yeah (.) **course** they'll they can move em about wherever they want really can't they?
<C> yeah
<A> you know you have to go there you have to go there (S2PY)

An expression signalling that a new point is upcoming contributes to floor management too: speaker keeps the floor or (re)claims it (34% of LP occurrences are turn-initial). For some speakers in particular, *and of course* seems to serve more to chain ideas together in a discourse sequence than as a hedge signaling shared ground and politeness.⁹ This is illustrated in (25) (see also 20b and 24a).

- (25) <A> mm
 and of course he was caught **and of course** that's even more serious ...
(S575)

We turn now to *of course* at RP. Findings by Haselow (2015) for some other PMs at RP -- *anyway, though, then* -- suggest that RP is used for “retrospective integration” (Haselow 2015, 165; see also Haselow 2012a, 2013). *Of course* at RP shows the same pattern. It serves

⁹ Some occurrences of ‘[connective] + *of course*’, such as *but of course* in (21) and *of course* in (19b) and (20), may also form a complete intonation unit with the nucleus on *course*, analogous to adverbial connectors like contrastive *in fact* or left-peripheral *however*.

to close an aside or a comment or clarification on the previous idea, before resuming the main narrative or argument, as in (26). In other words, the *of course* host together with the previous unit form a hypotactic discourse structure.

- (26) a. I get very large ones [=spiders] in the house sometimes sort of [and they stand out particularly on the dining room carpet **of course**] erm **but** well I mean they don't bother me particularly (S2UT)
- b. <A> he really exerted himself today and [this is <Name-A> **of course**] and I thought
 yeah
<A> I wish <Name-B> could hear that (SR7T)
- c. <A> there was a fish and chip shop on the way back we always used to stop they always mum said they all used to tuck away [she was just a young child then **of course**]
 mm
<A> back of the car with fish and chips (SPG4)

Often, the host unit conveying the aside is a sub-clausal unit, in which case *of course* can only occur at RP. This appears to be a syntactic constraint (which does not apply to all PMs). Sub-clausal constituents bear given information or new information of lower importance (27).

- (27) a. <A> I rigged that up right
 mm
<C> >>mm
<A> to play in every room in the house [bar the kitchen ni- and the bedrooms **of course**]
 >>mm (.) mm
<A> there's wires go underneath the coving (SDXW)
- b. so no wonder she doesn't like you she knows [not that I told her **of course**] but she 's a woman (S8B9)

In (27a) the more important information, as coded by Speaker, is not that the music does not play in the kitchen and bedrooms but that it does play in every other room in the house (cf. *I rigged that up not to play in the kitchen and the bedrooms*, where *of course* could be at LP or RP). In (27b) the more important information is not that “she knows” despite Speaker not telling her but that “she knows” because she is a woman (cf. *I didn't tell her*, where *of course* could also be at LP or RP). At the same time these are examples of hedging *of course*: the common ground in (27a) is that one would not expect music to be piped to the kitchen and bedrooms; in (27b) that the speaker would not reveal secrets. RP appears to be a site for marking the end of an ancillary information unit which comments on or adds detail to the previous (more salient) idea but is tangential to Speaker's main goals.

As has been seen, not all the data support a division between LP and RP along discourse prominence lines. In concessive constructions, *of course* is found at both LP and RP of the conceded point that the speaker backgrounds. *Of course* is no doubt continuing to evolve. Expectational *of course* at RP appears to date only from the early twentieth century

(the rare clause-final examples from the late nineteenth century data are resultative/inferential or habitual). Nevertheless, for this frequent modal adverb, information packaging in the context of the current discourse seems to have more to do with its position than its value as a marker of irony, concession or common ground.

RP *of course* arguably has a further information-packaging function where it occurs in post-topic or post-theme position. *Of course* then provides a boundary between the theme and the rheme, creating an expanded, marked theme (in brackets in the examples below), which is a different theme or contrasts in some other way with the previous discourse (the construction cannot occur discourse-initially). This is illustrated in (28) for presentative NPs of the type *the thing is [that]...* The pitch accent is on *other* in (28a) and (28b) and is followed by a falling intonation contour ending on *of course*. The theme with *of course* attached thus forms a complex presentative in its own intonation unit. The whole forms the ground for the salient information, which is postponed to a *that*-clause.

- (28) a. <A> oh yeah yeah well er I think that's a very good thing
 it's quite interesting to the game similar to it than um
 <A> and [the óther very good thing about it **of course**](THEME) um is is the fact that you can find people on there that you really wanna get in touch with (S2PS)
- b. <A> that they were getting hold of so many tickets
 okay no that's
 <A> you know
 a different kettle of fish okay right
 <A> that you wonder how it how it's being done you know and and [the óther big bone of contention **of course**](THEME) is that er even even when things are legitimately being s- sold through Ticketmaster (.) you have to pay a booking fee (SD8A)

The same pattern is observed in (29) for a simple theme-rheme structure (no *that*-clause).

- (29) <A> well the Gree- er some of the Greeks d- did amazing but so- er [some of the Árabs around **of course**](THEME) were
 mm
 <A> were astonishing (SGWU)

Example (30) shows adverbial themes, with the same intonation contour; in (30a) *potentially* contrasts with the unmodalized previous idea and in (30b) different times are in contrast.

- (30) a. <A> then you 've just got to cope with the actual journey there
 yeah
 <A> and back
 that's what I 'm saying
 <A> but [potentially **of course**](THEME)
 but that's that's potentially very
 <A> potentially you could get

- damaging
 <A> dropped off in the car then picked up (SRCD)
- b. <A> and also [when we moved in **of course**](THEME) nobody had a burglar alarm
 uh huh
 [three turns]
 <A> but [nów **of course**](THEME) that we're probably the only people on the road who have n't got one (SJ4X)

The usage may date from the turn of the twentieth century or before. Although no clear examples were found in the Old Bailey corpus, the construction is commented on in (31).

- (31) <W> he said to me " I am very sorry I bought that now of course I knew it was stolen" [...] I took a note of what was said in my note of "I am very sorry I bought that now - **of course** I knew it was stolen" there are no commas it could not have been "I am very sorry I bought that - now **of course** I know it was stolen" (OBC, 1912)

This post-theme position is occupied, with the same topic-focusing function, by many adverbials. The examples in (28), (29) and (30) are analogous to examples put forward by Ziv (2003) in her discussion of marked themes. Following Taglicht (1984), Ziv defines a marked theme as the initial constituent when it is detached from what would normally follow it in the unmarked case (for example, when the theme is the subject of the clause but is detached from the verb that would normally follow it).¹⁰ The function of this marked theme is to act as a “link”, defined as “a point of connection between the information presented in the current utterance and the prior context” (Ziv 2003, 3). The theme is detached by means of a PM in second position (i.e. after the theme). The theme and the PM together form the ground, the theme being the link and the PM being the tail.¹¹

Ziv’s claim is that the function of the second-position element in marking the theme depends solely on its position and its intonational and segmentational properties. What counts is “the utilization of this particular intonational phrasing” (Ziv 2003, 4). Her examples of elements in this function include *however* in (32).

- (32) The farmers' market the minister is sure to attend; <the students' demonstration, **however**,> <he may not be able to get to> (Ziv 2003, 6).

Post-theme *of course* is analyzed here as RP in (28), (29) and (30) and not as medial or parenthetical, first, because it makes best sense as belonging to (having scope over) the constituent it follows (the theme) rather than the sentence. The *of course* in (28a) makes more

10 This notion of “theme” corresponds to Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2004)’ definition of “theme” as defined by linear order: the first experiential constituent in the clause. But their definition of “marked theme” as any theme that is not the subject (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 64–79) differs from Taglicht’s (1984) definition.

11 The terms come from Vallduví and Engdahl’s (1996) framework for information structure whereby an information unit comprises a ground and a focus, the ground being often divided into “link” (to the discourse context) and “tail” (the rest of the ground) (see Vallduví and Engdahl 1996, 468–470).

sense in the context as ‘there is of course another very good thing’ than as ‘The other very good thing is of course that p’. The *of course* in (30a) only makes good sense if it modifies *potentially* and means ‘it may of course be possible for you to get dropped off ...’. To say ‘potentially you could of course get dropped off’ would be very odd. This is also the case for the NP themes: if *of course* had sentential scope, it would make sense in any sentence-adverbial slot. But the function of *of course* here is to mark the theme. The second reason is the intonation contour. The sequence <theme + *of course*> is immediately followed by a prosodic boundary. The hesitations after this boundary in (28a) and (28b) (*um is is; is that er*) suggest that Speaker fluently attaches *of course* to the theme before she has planned what to say next. In spoken language, prosodic units may be as relevant to interpreting linguistic structure, if not more relevant, than units identified on the basis of a sentence grammar. This is also the position of Haselow (2012b, 188), where “[t]he final position, moreover, is defined as the end of an intonation unit, i.e. a stretch of speech produced under a single coherent intonation contour”. A similar point is made by Lenker (2010, 237), who emphasizes that “post-first-position has to be distinguished from the other medial positions. ... Adverbial connectors in post-first-position ... single out one individual constituent of one of the connects and put it in the focus”. Post-theme occurrences of *of course* are best understood as operating on the preceding constituent. The vast majority of corpus occurrences of *of course* at RP only make sense with no stress and falling intonation. In all cases of RP *of course* the host is backgrounded, marked by *of course* as not one of the main goals of the speaker.

5 Discussion

The case study of *of course* has examined the relationship between function and position for a pragmatic marker that can occur in all PM positions, most commonly at LP and RP. Not all PMs in English can occur at both peripheries. Those that can include *actually, after all, anyway, at least, even so, in fact, of course, really, surely, then*. *Then* is interesting in the context of *of course*. Like *of course* it developed an inferential meaning from a temporal one and in PDE it is inferential at both LP and RP, but arguably with differing contributions to discourse structure (Haselow 2012a, 154).

While the functional distribution of *of course* has changed quite radically over the Modern English period, it is not possible to map these changes directly to positions. In the case of *of course* there was rather little change in the distribution of positions between the eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries, despite the evolving senses. This suggests syntagmatic entrenchment, with gradual local reanalysis of dependencies, such as scope increase, which in turn may facilitate new implicatures based on regular collocations. If *of course* has developed discourse-structuring functions, such as marking prominence relations, as has been argued, such functions seem to have evolved gradually, in existing linear positions. The relationship between pragmatic marker function and pragmatic marker position thus involves ongoing mutual influence. It has been seen that when the discourse structure (main vs ancillary information) of *of course* contexts is considered, a pattern emerges whereby LP *of course* tends to focus information and thus to introduce prominent information units, while RP *of course* follows units that comment on the previous idea and are ancillary to the main line of argument. But, as seen for concessive constructions, this is just a pattern and

not exceptionless. It may be, as Haselow (2012b, 186) claims, that final particles “form a paradigm where all members have a categorical value”, linking their host unit to the preceding discourse. This hypothesis is promising and compatible with the data on *of course*, but remains to be tested more widely.

The question arises whether the changes observed in the development of *of course* across the Late Modern period to PDE represent increasing grammaticalization. Expectational *of course* can be seen to have undergone semantic abstraction, prosodic reduction and informational backgrounding. Semantically there is increasing abstraction in the sense of the adverb, from more objective to more subjective and intersubjective; from referencing the physical world to the mental world of reasoning, the marking of Speaker’s epistemic stance and the signalling of relative informational prominence to shape Speaker’s line of argument. Within a framework that posits a lexical-grammatical cline, this is a shift towards the more grammatical end of that cline. Semantic reduction tends to be paralleled by prosodic reduction. Bybee (2003, 616) notes that “the informational contribution of the grammaticized elements decreases and along with that the intonational and rhythmic emphasis”; this has been seen for Expectational *of course*. Wichmann (2011, 341) also emphasizes the role of prosodic reduction: “grammaticalization involves not only (and not always) the attrition of phonetic substance but more importantly the loss of prosodic prominence.”. Wichmann et al. (2010, 138–139) report that *of course* in their spoken data is prosodically integrated to its host in around 80% of occurrences. In our data Expectational *of course* at RP, and often at LP too, makes best sense integrated, its host bearing the prosodic prominence. This study has suggested that Expectational *of course* is itself (part of) the ground of the unit it forms with its host, at both LP, where it “presents” its host, and RP, where it marks its host’s relation to the previous, more prominent idea. These observations point to ongoing grammaticalization.

Boye and Harder (2012) in fact define “grammatical” in informational terms when they equate it with lack of discourse prominence: in their framework, expressions are by convention grammatical or lexical but it is their syntagmatic operation in use (specifically their role in relation to the roles of other elements in the utterance) that makes the distinction real. Applied to *of course*, this hypothesis makes a clear distinction between Assertive and Expectational *of course*. The former operates on the epistemic level but is discourse-prominent, the epistemic stance being the main point of the whole utterance containing or consisting of *of course*. The latter also (inter alia) marks epistemic stance but is non-prominent. Assertive *of course* under Boye and Harder’s framework will be conventionally lexical and Expectational *of course* grammatical. This is an interesting approach to defining grammaticality; it remains to be seen how it works out when applied to a wide range of grammaticalization phenomena.

A further question that arises is whether *of course* might be more or less grammaticalized at LP or at RP and how it might evolve in the future. We leave the question open but note two tendencies. The first is that Expectational *of course* seems to be declining in frequency while *of course* the response particle increases (Figure 3). The second is the rate of phonological reduction to *course*. Reduction was observed in very informal discourse. Most cases of reduction in the data (around three quarters) concern Assertive *of course* when followed by pronoun + pro-verb; next come Expectational *of course* at LP, while at RP reduction is very rare.

6 Conclusion

It has been argued that PDE usage *of course* developed gradually following the lexicalization of the prepositional phrase by the eighteenth century, through a resultative adverbial connector ('as a result') and inferential adverb to the different PDE usages that involve both epistemic and discourse-structuring functions. Little change in the positional distribution was found. In PDE *of course* was seen to be split into a response particle and an epistemic modal adverb that has discourse-structuring functions that largely co-vary with position. At LP this *of course* can introduce a new point or a new topic and often acts as a presentative, while at RP it is retrospective – it relates its host to the previous idea and the current topic. For RP *of course* to be felicitous, the host must be relevant to the previous idea and be construed as a comment or an aside on it. Exceptions have been seen to the association of Expectational *of course* with discourse foregrounding at LP and backgrounding at RP, so it is a tendency, not (yet) grammaticalized.

As well as PMs, other speaker-stance expressions occur at both peripheries. They include comment clauses such as *I mean, you see, you know, mind you*, and also with all kinds of evaluative and epistemic sentence adverbs such as *unfortunately, luckily, curiously, probably, perhaps, I think, maybe*. Comparisons between pragmatic markers and these other types of adverbial would be useful to identify possible shared motivations for their distributions. *Of course* continues to evolve. A panchronic approach that analyzes contemporary data in the light of historical data can provide the best vantage point for understanding the synchronic patterns and variations as well as the ongoing evolution.

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