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Review of the Rise of Discourse Markers (Heine et al. 2021)

By Eric Mélaç for Journal of Linguistics

The Rise of Discourse Markers, by Bernd Heine, Gunther Kaltenböck, Tania Kuteva, and Haiping Long is an outstanding reference work for any linguist interested in discourse and language change. It provides a review of the scattered literature describing the role and evolution of discourse markers (from now 'DMs') in several languages, as well as a clear synthesis of the most recent developments in the theories of language change. Even though DMs are indispensable, pervasive tools in everyday conversations, they had been neglected by several generations of grammarians, before becoming a vibrant field of study in the past three decades. The functions of DMs are notoriously difficult to investigate, which has led linguists to develop new analytical frameworks. The various, overlapping terminologies and concepts that have emerged to account for the behaviour of DMs make the literature particularly challenging to unravel. This challenge was successfully taken up by the four authors, and *the Rise of Discourse Markers* will answer many questions of any researcher who has been waiting for a work making sense of the heterogeneous contributions to the field.

The book contains the following sections:

- (1) an introduction on the development of discourse markers, which discusses the properties that the previous literature has identified to define DMs (chapter 1). It also presents the several hypotheses that have been investigated to account for their rise, and finally examines the problematic specificities regarding the emergence and evolution of discourse markers which are hard to reconcile with an all-grammaticalization hypothesis;
- (2) a presentation of the concepts that are used in this book (ch. 2). It indicates the main criteria defining grammaticalization and cooptation, which are both involved in the rise of DMs. It presents an innovative, comprehensive description of cooptation, which is argued to be a key stage in the process;
- (3) a selection of case studies on the development of DMs in four languages (ch. 3, 4, 5, and 6): twelve English DMs (*after all, like, well...*), six French DMs (*à la rigueur, en fait...*), eight Japanese DMs (*demo, ga...*), and four Korean DMs (*icey, maliya...*). This section provides a detailed step-by-step account of the rise of those DMs in order to test the grammaticalization-cooptation hypothesis;
- (4) an analysis of the behaviour of discourse markers in language contact (ch. 7), illustrating the processes of borrowing in a variety of languages. This chapter also offers theoretical analyses on the

functions of discourse as they are revealed by the transfer of DMs from one language to another. A case study of Arabic *Yaa'ni*, as an example of the areal development of DMs, concludes the section;

(5) a final discussion and a conclusion (ch. 8 and 9), which summarize the authors' views on the role of grammaticalization and cooptation in the rise of DMs, and give an overview of the origins and classifications of DMs.

The introduction provides examples that explain clearly how the same form can function as a simple lexical item or a DM. It offers a definition of DMs, and a useful list of their properties, thus arguing why they should be considered a separate, coherent category (Fraser 1988 ; Brinton 1996 ; Hansen 1997 ; Aijmer et al. 2006). Always adopting a very intelligible style, it also synthesizes the literature on the different hypotheses regarding their development. Providing a concise, structured review of such a disputed research field was a necessary, but far from easy task, and the authors have managed to complete it successfully. Even though one has to accept that, like for other linguistic categories, the boundaries can be fuzzy, additional syntactic and semantic tests, as well as more explicit contrastive examples, could have been useful. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish DMs from neighbouring items such as interjections or comment clauses, and one may also wonder whether certain sentence adverbs (*apparently, clearly...*), or exclamatives (*wow, sure...*) should be classified as DMs.

The authors then present how DMs have been dealt with in the different approaches of language change. They provide a very valuable, concise account of the development of DMs from the perspective of grammaticalization, pragmatization, lexicalization, cooptation, constructionalization, as well as other lines of research (Traugott 1995; Hayashi & Yoon 2006; Wischer 2000; Heine 2013; Traugott & Trousdale 2013). This section brings to light the salient points and difficulties that each approach has revealed, and demonstrates the necessity of the authors' work since none of these theories suffices to explain the phenomenon in its entirety. The main issue seems to be that previous approaches have failed to account for all the stages that markers have to go through before reaching the status of DMs. It is also disputed whether DMs belong to grammar, since they do not behave like lexical items, but are distinct from typical grammatical items on various aspects: their discursive function, textual scope, syntactic detachment, prosodic independence, and flexible position (Fraser 1988; Traugott 1995; Waltereit 2002; Brinton & Traugott 2005). Each property that makes DMs stand apart from other linguistic forms correspond to diachronic mechanisms that need to be examined, and documented chronologically in order to explain how they relate to one another when DMs arise.

The authors have thus efficiently covered a very large area in the introduction, and have remarkably presented most of the literature, giving us all the background knowledge necessary to fully understand the following content of the book.

Chapter 2, entitled 'Concepts of Analysis', expounds with great clarity the framework and the methods adopted in the book, as well as the limits of the study. The authors are well aware that diachronic investigations present numerous difficulties such as piecemeal data, and non-verifiable ambiguities. This is all the more true when dealing with items that flourish in spoken language, such as DMs. This chapter presents a very convincing demonstration of the necessity to integrate cooptation as a major process of language change. DMs belong to the larger category of theticals, which are defined as items encoding discourse grammar instead of sentence grammar (Kaltenböck et al. 2011). Cooptation is one step in the development of theticals, and this instantaneous process can occur before and/or after the grammaticalization of DMs. Cooptation is presented both as a cognitive and linguistic phenomenon. The authors argue for a multidimensional characterization of this process that involves meaning, function, syntax, prosody, semantic-pragmatic scope, and placement. This approach rightfully draws our attention to the frequent co-occurrence of mechanisms impacting different linguistic levels, thus justifying that cooptation is observable through the presence of several symptoms. However, because cooptation is multidimensional, it can be difficult to pinpoint when it starts, and when it ends. The authors draw a sharp distinction between (a) '**You probably know already** that our chairman will resign next month' and (b) 'Our chairman, **you probably know already**, will resign next month' (ex. 7, p. 65). They argue that the clause in bold in (b) is the coopted version of the one in (a) because '(i) its meaning is not part of its host sentence, (ii) its function can be said to be metatextual [...], (iii) it is syntactically unattached [...], (iv) it is likely to be set off prosodically [...], and (v) it can be moved to other positions of the sentence' (p. 66). These observations confirm the existence of discourse grammar as distinct from sentence grammar, but I wonder whether all the listed mechanisms were actually involved in the development of (b) out of (a). As the authors themselves point out, (a) and (b) mean 'essentially the same' (p. 65), and I would argue that (a) also has a metatextual meaning, since it is a clause that participates in the management of discourse. Although this example is presented as a textbook case, certain characteristics of cooptation, such as semantic shift, do not seem to be relevant here. It seems that the most determining difference between (a) and (b) is the syntactic independence of the clause in bold in (b), which can be tested by its freedom of placement. It can thus be argued that a narrower definition of cooptation may be more operationalizable, e.g. 'the syntactic detachment of a metatextual item', while the other dimensions, such as semantic change, scope variability, or prosodic detachment are just frequent by-products, and not determining criteria for the diagnosis of cooptation *per se*.

In the following chapters (3, 4, 5, and 6), the authors have compiled in-depth case studies in English, French, Japanese and Korean that justify their framework, and document the cross-linguistic relevance of their analyses. The DMs in each language are investigated with the same depth, which is rare in typological work, given that the general descriptions of some languages are more advanced than others. This section brilliantly shows that the diachronic phenomena the authors have revealed are observable in unrelated languages. The authors humbly admit that they have failed in their investigation of other language families, and this is perfectly understandable since some data are far more available for some languages than others. Nevertheless, a more diversified language sample would have better supported the universal ambition of the book. French and English belong to the Indo-European family, and have influenced each other greatly, while Japanese and Korean are typologically comparable. It would have been useful to read a few examples of DMs in isolating or polysynthetic languages, just to see whether the category is also relevant for them. The criteria for constituting the sample of DMs in each language could also have been made more explicit. In French, for example, very frequent DMs, such as *là*, or *du coup* (Forget 1989; Rossari & Jayez 2000; Chanet 2000 *inter alia*), are not mentioned whereas the rather infrequent *à la rigueur* or *à propos* are analyzed in detail. However, the authors have probably been wise to include only instances that were backed up by a large amount of verifiable historical data. We are thus presented an impressive investigation of the step-by-step development of a variety of DMs, and future work will likely confirm the observed patterns in other, less-investigated languages.

Chapter 7, entitled 'Discourse Markers in Language Contact', provides a good overview of the borrowing or contact-induced replication of DMs. Despite the little amount of historical data available in the literature, the authors provide examples from several languages that clearly illustrate the borrowing of DMs. Most of the chapter is devoted to the communicative and cognitive functions of DMs that can explain their easy movement from one language to another. The authors offer a well-written, accessible synthesis of what DMs are used for. Given how complex it is to grasp the discursive functions of DMs in bilingual and monolingual speech, such a concise, well-structured description is a very valuable contribution for linguistics, but also for other fields, such as psychology, and sociology. Further discourse analysis and psycholinguistic work could also have been cited in order to substantiate and measure some of the claims (Berman 2008; Al-Surmi 2011; Rasenberg et al. 2018; Bosker et al. 2021 *inter alia*), but the focused style of the chapter makes it very pleasant to read. As far as the sociological dimension is concerned, I wonder whether it is necessary to use the terms 'socio-economic values' and 'emblematic status', instead of referring to the more established concepts of

'overt and covert prestige' (Labov 1966). The paradoxical prestige of DMs could also have been confronted, since some DMs, such as *like* in English or *genre* in French are usually stigmatized, and are frequently used compulsively despite their functional redundancy (Schiffrin 1987: 310; Andersen 1998: 150).

The discussion and conclusion of the book are engaging since they provide both a clear synthesis of what has been developed, and open new perspectives. The authors admit that even though the processes leading to the rise of DMs are now well documented, little is known about what actually motivates their development. They explore several hypotheses, thus paving the way to new, compelling areas of research. They also offer a clear overview of what we know about the origins of DMs, and the precise criteria that make certain linguistic items potential sources for them.

In conclusion, *the Rise of Discourse Markers* is a long-awaited, imposing reference work that must have required numerous years of data mining and scientific collaboration. This well-crafted book is an unprecedented synthesis of a fruitful research field that is of great interest for specialists and general linguists alike. It presents with a clear, structured style an impressive number of well-selected references as well as exclusive, cutting-edge investigations.

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