Chapter 6

Pragmatic markers in translation: a methodological proposal

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1. Introduction

Research on discourse particles faces two major challenges. On the theoretical side there is a clear need for a model of communication which is rich enough to account for the complexity of the functioning of discourse particles. It seems to us that there is no such model and that research findings regarding various aspects of the functions of discourse particles have not as yet been accommodated within an overarching framework. This paper proposes one way in which such a model can be developed. In section 4 we discuss how particles relate to the utterance, to the context and to the hearer. These three aspects, which we refer to as reflexivity, indexicality, and heteroglossia respectively, seem to us crucial to the understanding of discourse particles. The second challenge of particle research is to deepen our insight into the multifunctionality of these elements in order to arrive at a satisfactory account of meaning relations on the semantic and pragmatic level. A variety of research methods are thus necessary so that findings arrived at by different routes can be compared with each other to confirm or throw into doubt a given account of multifunctionality. In section 6 we suggest that the translation method is a useful empirical tool for contrasting particles in different languages. Not only does it provide data on how languages deal with similar meanings (thus contributing to typological insights), but, we argue, it also offers a way of dealing with the indeterminacy of the meaning of discourse particles. Through translations, it becomes possible to map semantic fields, which in turn give us a basis on which to establish basic underlying meanings or to confirm an earlier hypothesised meaning. In section 3 we specify our own position with regard to multifunctionality, polysemy and core meaning. This is further illustrated in section 5. Before dealing with these issues we clarify our use of terminology in section 2.

2. Definition

Discourse particles belong, in our view, to the more general category of pragmatic markers. The latter are defined here negatively: if a word or construction in an utterance does not contribute to the propositional, truth-functional content, then we consider it to be a pragmatic marker. We are in agreement with Fraser (1996). Foolen...
(2001), and Hansen (this volume), who also propose to start with pragmatic marker as the most general functional term and then to subclassify the markers on the basis of more detailed functional distinctions. Such functional subcategories include, for example, politeness markers, hesitation markers, and discourse-organisational markers. In addition, we propose to take formal criteria into account in this subclassification. Formal subcategorisation distinguishes, for instance, between particles, adverbs, and pragmatic expressions.

One of the difficulties in deciding whether a given form should be considered to be a pragmatic marker is that a single form often fulfils in certain of its uses a function on the propositional level and in other uses a function on the non-propositional level. Thus, if we want to be precise, we should not ask whether a given form is a pragmatic marker or not, but rather whether a given use of a given form can be considered a pragmatic marker. While for some forms it is easy to distinguish uses as pragmatic markers from other uses (for instance the pragmatic marker well as opposed to the manner adverb), for other forms the line is less obvious (for instance, the pragmatic expression I think as opposed to the mental process verb). One should also allow for fluidity and take a dynamic view on the issue. For instance, many adverbs (including certainly, surely, of course) seem to be on the boundary between modal adverb and pragmatic marker (see Hoye, 1997: 212; Lewis, 1999; Simon-Vandenbergen and Aijmer, forthcoming).

It should be emphasised here that we use the term marker in a purely technical sense. Other authors (see Fischer, this volume, section 3) have felt that terms such as instruction or marker leave too little room for the active roles played by speakers and hearers as creators and interpreters of contextual aspects of the utterance. Roulet (this volume), for example, prefers pointer or indicator. This accords with our own view that the character of such words is typically indexical, in other words that these elements merely “indicate”, leaving the hearer with a significant amount of interpretational work (see section 4.2). The term marker for us does not imply either a passive speaker or a passive hearer. Its usefulness as a technical term lies in its wide currency in a field in which, we believe, a proliferation of terms must be avoided.

Even if research has not (as yet) come up with hard and fast criteria to determine whether the use of a particular form is to be considered a pragmatic marker, it seems that there is a sense in practice of what to include in the category. However, a concern with explicit definitions should, in our view, remain on the agenda. How do we treat intlections, focus particles, connectives like but and because? Do connectives have pragmatic uses in addition to propositional ones? In Sweetser’s (1990) framework, which allows connectives to function in different domains, this is indeed the case (see also Schiffrin, this volume, on and).

Classification of the markers in formal terms is of a different order. We can subdivide markers into segmental and suprasegmental elements, and into particles versus fuller forms (a characterisation on the phonological-morphological level), and we can classify the expressions in terms of syntactic form classes, based on the system in a given language. Formal and functional classifications do not necessarily coincide, although, assuming the existence of iconic forces, one would expect function-form correlations.

Discourse particles form a subclass of the more comprehensive functional class of pragmatic markers. They are distinguished here on formal and functional grounds from other types of pragmatic markers, such as modal or focus particles, pragmatic expressions (a term we reserve for expressions such as I mean, I think, you know), or connectives. A useful list of criteria is provided by Jucker and Ziv (1996), based on Brinton (1996). In addition to the functional feature of multifunctionality, it includes phonological and syntactic features: discourse particles are typically monosyllabic and are placed in the pre-front field, cf. Auer (1996). A combination of functional, phonological, and syntactic criteria would then classify such words as well or now as discourse particles, to be distinguished from pragmatic expressions, as well as from elements such as German ja, doch, eben; Dutch maar, toch, even; or Swedish ju, nog, väl. Such particles, which exist in all Germanic languages except English, are sometimes called discourse particles, but they actually share only some properties with the English-type discourse particles (Fillmore, 1984). Another common term for the German, Dutch, and Swedish particles just mentioned is modal particles, which, although not entirely felicitous, has the advantage of distinguishing the category from discourse particles (see also Jucker and Ziv (1996): 2) on the terminological confusion in this area).

When we have made enough headway in determining what the pragmatic markers are in different languages, a contrastive and typological step can be taken, guided by the following questions:

- Which elements fulfil pragmatic functions in the languages of the world?
- How can these elements be classified in formal terms?
- How can these elements be classified in formal terms?
- How do languages differ with regard to these functional and formal classes?

On the basis of such inventories and comparisons, more interesting questions are possible: can languages be classified into those which are “poor” in pragmatic markers versus those that are “rich”? Are there correlations between this and other aspects of the language? It will be some time before research on pragmatic markers has reached the level that such questions can be answered. But if our aim is to make research in this area normal linguistic business, then we should ask the same kinds of questions about pragmatic markers as about any other kind of linguistic element.

3. The functional spectrum

In addition to the difficulty of differentiating pragmatic markers from the rest of the linguistic system, two other problems seem prominent in this area of research, namely, the elusiveness of the meaning of pragmatic markers and their polyfunctionality.

First, there is the problem of dealing with elements that lack propositional meaning. Expressions that contribute to the propositional content of an utterance refer to objects, properties, relations, and quantifications. Although the meaning of pragmatic markers cannot be explained in similar terms, this does not imply that pragmatic markers are meaningless. What kind of meanings is at issue then? Are these core-meanings and core-meanings? How many meanings is it useful to distinguish? Which meanings belong to semantics and which ones to pragmatics? These are questions that have plagued researchers for a long time (see Foonen and Van der Wouden, 2002), and while there may
be no right answer to these questions, we believe it is important to make one's position on them explicit.

We propose to adopt the notion of core meaning as a starting point. It should be noted that this concept (also referred to as basic meaning) is not used consistently in the literature. For some authors, it is the unifying semantic meaning that serves as input for pragmatic differentiations. In this view, the core meaning is underspecified or undifferentiated and in fact impossible to define except in terms of its multiple contextual uses. For others, core meaning constitutes the central semantic meaning to which other coded meanings can be related. According to this view, the core meaning may be identical with or coloured by the original diachronic meaning.1

For us, the core meaning is the central, or underlying, meaning to which pragmatic meanings can be related. This meaning is necessarily a fairly abstract notion, not necessarily conforming to native speakers' intuitions. We find evidence for it in the diachronic development of the particle, that is, in the traces of its lexical origin which are retained in its present-day usage. There are several advantages to positing a core meaning defined by semantic components or by a paraphrase. First, it ensures that pragmatic uses are explicable, since they cannot be random or arbitrary. Second, it allows us to specify and explain overlapping and diverging functions between pragmatic markers in terms of their different core meanings. Third, it serves as a hypothesis for a tertium comparationis in contrastive research (see section 6). And finally, we do not need a separate account for synchronic and diachronic phenomena, since the same principles explain extensions into the pragmatic domains.

The second difficulty, the notorious polyfunctionality of pragmatic markers, is closely related to the abstract nature of the core meaning and to the strategic uses that speakers make of such markers in different contexts. It is evident that the contextual meanings are the result of speakers' tactical uses of elements that are semantically vague enough to allow for multiple purposes.2 In general terms, we can say that pragmatic markers have interpersonal and textual rather than ideational functions. Moreover, because of their context dependency, they tend to have a rather large number of different functions in these domains. The question that remains is how to explain polyfunctionality. In recent years, different models have been proposed within cognitive semantics for explaining polysemy, such as radial categories, prototypes, and core meanings. In principle, the relative success of these models for content words and constructions on the propositional level should be taken into consideration in adopting particular models, or aspects of them, for the description of pragmatic markers. At the same time, pragmatic markers can serve as an interesting testing ground for such models.

The difference between coded meanings and contextual implicatures (pragmatic enrichments) should be considered in the analysis of polyfunctional phenomena. As a guideline, we would advocate a methodological minimalism, in which coded meanings are only assumed if they cannot be derived by processes of conversational implicature. Translations can be of use here. In a translation corpus, some meanings are frequently picked out by a special translation equivalent and recur in more than one language. These are the coded, conventionalised meanings which should be distinguished from more temporary, context-specific and creative meanings which can be processed by inferencing.

A model which is based on an underlying core meaning on the semantic level and implicatures on the pragmatic level seems to be appropriate in most cases. Such a model finds support in diachronic research. Grammaticalization processes seem to develop along metonymic lines, as a result of rhetorical uses of particular items (Traugott, 1999b). In the process, content meanings are bleached in favour of the types of meanings typically expressed by pragmatic markers (see also section 4.3 below on the rhetorical function of pragmatic markers).

The preceding discussion might give the impression that in our model, we want to allow only a single core meaning and the contextual implicatures that can be derived from it. But we are not opposed to polysemy networks for pragmatic markers as proposed, for example, by Hansen (this volume, section 1.4.1). We simply want to stress that within the polysemy network, one of the nodes often has a prototypical or core status, or, alternatively, that an abstraction over the different nodes is possible, resulting in a core meaning. Particularised and generalised implicatures, polysemy networks, prototypical meanings and abstract core meanings, are all potentially relevant in a full description of the meaning of a particle (see Aijmer, 2002a: 19-26, for further discussion).

4. The model

When we communicate we do not use language simply to convey a message. We use certain linguistic elements metalinguistically to refer to the text or the utterance itself. This relation is explained by our principle of reflexivity. We can also use pragmatic markers to point to contextual or social phenomena outside the utterance or the text. This relation between the speaker and the outer world is explained by a principle of indexicality (Ochs, 1996). Finally, our utterances can be used strategically to take up different positions vis-à-vis other people, and other opinions in a heteroglossic perspective.

We will focus in the following sections on the notions of reflexivity, indexicality, and, in particular, heteroglossia. These notions play a role in other contributions to this volume, but not in combination with each other as we propose here. This account will be compared with the relevance-theoretical account of pragmatic markers, in particular the idea that they have procedural meaning.

4.1. Reflexivity

Pragmatic markers support the interpretation of more central informative aspects of the utterance by commenting implicitly on the utterance or the text. From the point of view of the utterance, the marker thus has a "meta" status, and an understanding of pragmatic markers involves what is variously called their metalinguistic, metacomunicative, metapragmatic, or metadiscursive character (Nyan, this volume). We refer to this property of pragmatic markers as reflexivity.

That natural language is its own metalanguage has long been recognized in linguistic philosophy. However, the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in language structure and language use is now gradually becoming clear, thanks to theoretical frameworks in which reflexivity is given a central place, such as Lucy (1993) and Clark (in press). As Lucy
states in his introduction (1993: 11), "speech is permeated by reflexive activity as speakers remark on language, report utterances, index and describe aspects of the speech event . . . . This reflexivity is so pervasive and essential that we can say that language is, by nature, fundamentally reflexive".

Clark (in press), within his theory on communication as joint activity, distinguishes two systems of communication, the primary system which "represents the official business of conversation, what people are primarily trying to do in speaking", and what he calls the collateral system. This latter system is "that part of language use in which people coordinate, establish, or manage their primary language. It is not normally the official business of conversation, or what the participants are primarily trying to do". Within the collateral system, Clark distinguishes different subsystems, among them side exchanges, in which speaker and hearer explicitly take turns to clarify certain aspects of the ongoing conversation, and asides, short signals like oh, uh, um, that speakers insert in their utterance "to help explain features of the current performance". In relation to asides, Clark mentions that "expressions such as I mean, you know, excuse me, well, oh, like, uh, now, uh, and um . . . have been classified under a plethora of names". He summarizes several schemes of classification, and concludes: "It remains to be seen how these schemes deal with the contrast between primary and collateral language".

We would suggest that the expressions that Clark mentions fit very well within his collateral system. By using pragmatic markers, speakers try to prevent explicit, time-consuming side exchanges that risk causing irritation or even conflict. From the point of view of reflexivity, pragmatic markers are condensed, grammaticalized substitutes for side exchanges. Speakers indicate that they are aware of certain potentially problematic aspects of their utterances, while at the same time they propose implicitly to the hearer to continue the "official" business of conversation.

### 4.2. Indexicality

What is the semiotic status of pragmatic markers? Do they have symbolic, iconic, or deictic-indexical meaning? In recent years, several authors have argued that pragmatic markers have deictic meaning: see, for example, Hentschel (1986) for German modal particles, Wilkins (1992, 1995) for interjections, and Ochs (1996) and Schiffrin (this volume) for various types of markers. As with polysemy (see section 3), the property of indexicality is not exclusive to pragmatic markers. Some grammatical forms and structures that participate in expressing propositional content are also deictic: pronouns, tense forms, adverbs of time and place. They point to participants, time, and space as present in the communicative situation, so their referential value depends on the communicative situation. The same is true for pragmatic markers. The crucial question is, however, what do they point to? Here we have to turn to aspects of the communicative situation which are less concrete than participants, time, and place and which are not yet understood in their full complexity. For example, pragmatic markers may index positionings in relation to persons or to the proposition itself.

A number of authors have tried to explicate some of these aspects of the communicative situation. Schiffrin (1987a) distinguishes five planes: the ideational structure, action structure, exchange structure, information state, and participant framework. Ochs (1996) also assumes a range of situational dimensions such as social acts and social activities indexed either lexically or grammatically. However, only an explicit theory of communicative interaction can form the basis for a reasoned distinction of the relevant dimensions or planes particles can point to. Other authors in the present volume also argue for the need for such a general model. Roulet (this volume, section 1), for example, advocates "the elaboration of a global model of the complexity of the organization of discourse, a model which provides a place to locate DM [Discourse Markers] within".

Blakemore (1987) has analysed discourse markers within the framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986). She proposed the notion of procedural meaning to characterize the type of contribution these elements make to the communicative process. In Blakemore's (1987) view, expressions like but, moreover, etc., are "instructions for processing propositions" (see the reference to Blakemore 1996: 151 in the paper by Ler Soon Lay, this volume). This view seems close to what we called the reflexive status of discourse markers. If procedural meaning also implies the notion of indexicality, then Blakemore's formulation would encompass the two notions of reflexivity and indexicality.

In recent years, however, Relevance Theory has made additional distinctions, with the result that our distinctions can no longer be easily mapped onto Relevance Theory distinctions. In addition to the distinction between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional, there are the distinctions between procedural and conceptual meaning, between implicatures and explicatures, and between higher-level and normal explicatures. The concept of procedural meaning is now applied to all elements that lack a clear conceptual meaning (‘cat’, ‘happy’), so that indexicals like he and yesterday are considered procedural elements (cf. Carston, 2002: 160-164). In this use of the term, it comes close to, or might even be co-extensive with, what we term indexical meaning. As is pointed out by those working within Relevance Theory, however, expressions like frankly and in other words have conceptual meaning. Some of these expressions, such as in other words, could very well be considered to be discourse markers. This would mean that indexicality is not a defining property of discourse markers, but at most a prototypical property. We would claim, however, in line with grammaticalization theory, that discourse markers with conceptual meaning tend to develop diachronically into markers with indexical meaning.

Relevance Theory does not distinguish a class of discourse markers per se, but a distinction is made between elements that contribute to truth-conditional content and those that do not. Within the latter group, some elements, such as frankly, contribute higher-level explicatures, whereas others, such as but, contribute an implicature. This suggests that propositional attitude markers and discourse markers involve different kinds of meaning. Both, however, have a reflexive relation to the propositional content of the utterance.

It follows from this comparison that indexicality and reflexivity are not properties that are exclusive to discourse markers. However, all discourse markers are reflexive in relation to the proposition, and most of them have indexical status. Further meta-theoretical research seems to be necessary here (see Blakemore, 2002).
4.3. Heteroglossia

If we adopt the very general functional definition of a pragmatic marker proposed in section 2, that is, as an item in the utterance which does not contribute to its truth-functional content, we of course end up with a class of items with very diverse discourse functions. Indeed, these functions are so diverse that it may be hard to see whether the items share anything at all apart from the absence of a truth-functional contribution. This is one reason why there is little agreement between authors on what to include in the class and why authors make different decisions about categorization. Those authors who do not take the most inclusive view tend to restrict the class either to items with a primarily textual function (see especially Fraser, this volume) or to those with a primarily interpersonal function (see for instance Andersen and Fretheim, 2000). If we adopt a broad view, we must establish what, if anything, for example, a textual item such as however shares with an interpersonal one such as surely. In addition, we must account for the multifunctionality of individual pragmatic markers. For instance, the word well has, judging by the various explanations which have been given in the extensive literature, both a textual and an interpersonal function (see Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003) for an overview). Fischer (this volume) refers to the range of functions which are “often cumulatively” considered to be one of the essential characteristics of the class of pragmatic markers, and it appears from her list that some of these functions are textual (such as discourse structuring) while others are interpersonal (such as politeness).

We would like to propose one way of dealing with pragmatic markers which we believe offers a framework that can accommodate their functional heterogeneity. Central to this communication model is the notion of heteroglossia, a notion that originates with Bakhtin. In what follows we will explain in what way the Bakhtinian concept will be understood here and will then argue that pragmatic markers can be usefully integrated into such a framework. We will also briefly refer to other work on pragmatic markers in which a related approach is taken and will point to similarities and differences in focus.

Bakhtin (1981) uses the term heteroglossia to refer to the existence of different “languages”, or world-views (see Björklund, 2000: 8):

By heteroglossia Bakhtin means the stratification of any language into different sociological “languages” (Bakhtin, 1981: 271-272), which are forms for conceptualizing specific world views (pp. 291-292).

This means that in a world dominated by heteroglossia, no utterance has meaning on its own and that all texts reflect the existence of other texts and can only be understood in these terms. It also means that monologue does not really exist, that all language use is dialogue. Dialogue is a central notion in Bakhtin’s theory:

A word, discourse, language or culture undergoes “dialogization” when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language is authoritative or absolute. (Bakhtin, 1981: 427, editor’s note).

Our understanding and use of the concepts of heteroglossia and dialogization follows White (1999, 2000), who adopts the Bakhtinian perspective to account for the options that speakers have for positioning themselves intersubjectively. In White’s framework of engagement, i.e., the meanings through which speakers express their alignments and disalignments with other, previous propositions or expected propositions, the systems of epistemic modality and evidentiality are brought together as different options taken by speakers for different types of stancing.

It is clear that there is an affinity between White’s framework of engagement and other models which see epistemic modality as part of a broader system. Chafe’s (1986) model of evidentiality is an obvious precedent. Chafe, too, brings together epistemic modality and expressions referring to the mode of knowing and the source of knowledge. Also included are expressions signalling agreement or conflict with expectations, such as of course, naturally, oddly enough, surprisingly. The main difference between Chafe’s and White’s accounts lies in the way they explain the verbal choices language users make. Chafe’s account is framed in terms of knowledge (degrees and modes), and choices are seen as explicable from the extent to which speakers are certain that what they are saying is actually true and from the ways in which they have acquired their knowledge about a state-of-affairs. White’s account is not framed in terms of knowledge or degrees of certainty, but rather in terms of rhetorical positioning. This entails that epistemic choices (such as I think or may) do not always express lack of certainty but in fact are often used for entirely different reasons, to do with interactional strategies. Although this difference may be seen as one of focus rather than fundamental disagreement, it is the rhetorical explanation which we believe allows us to account for both the existence of pragmatic markers and their multifunctionality. For instance, work on I think (see especially Aijmer, 1997; Kärkkäinen, 2003; Simon-Vandenbergen, 2000) has shown that this expression, while sometimes functioning as a marker of epistemic uncertainty, more often operates as a conversational routine or even as a way of individualising one’s propositions in an authoritative way. Aijmer (2002b) shows that surely typically conveys doubt rather than certainty. Ostman (1981) has demonstrated that you know is typically used when the speaker knows that the hearer does not in fact know; hence, it appears to serve as a rhetorical device to evoke solidarity by pretending that there is common ground. Thus, I think, surely, and you know have a heteroglossic purpose and are options that allow speakers to express heterogeneity of world-views and diverging stances.

Diverging stances are omnipresent in linguistic interaction and require communicative remedying and problem-solving. But time-outs for metacommunicative interaction would take up much of the time and energy invested in a conversation. In our view, pragmatic markers exist to counteract metacommunicative interruptions by providing a way to communicate implicitly, deictically, on possible diverging stances with regard to particular communicative dimensions. This implicit communication runs parallel to the uninterrupted explicit communication on the content level.

Diverging stances may be of different types. One type has to do with the relation between interactants. In this case, pragmatic markers are ways of resolving the problem of open conflict or disagreement. They thus serve as an acknowledgment of the speaker’s awareness of their position or possible position and hence may function as politeness markers. Another type of stance relates to the speaker’s own subjective reaction to either an event or another proposition. In these cases, pragmatic markers signal to the addressee the speaker’s interpretation of the position of the event or proposition in the larger context. The choices which signal awareness of the dialogical process always assume a
divergence or possible divergence of some sort. In what follows, we shall illustrate these points with uses of the discourse particle well.

The framework of heteroglossia and the view of pragmatic markers as dialogizing devices which we propose here parallels in other work, in particular in the concept of polyphony as developed by Ducrot (1984). As pointed out by Roulet (1996), however, Bakhtin and Ducrot “work within two very different frames, the sociology of verbal interaction for Bakhtin and what he calls ‘ideal discourse structuralism’ for Ducrot”.

5. Illustration: well in a heteroglossic perspective

Well is notoriously vague and versatile (see Ajimer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003) and a correct analysis is therefore very difficult to define. However, it seems to us that the communication model of heteroglossia makes it possible to capture the invariant meaning as well as the multifunctionality of this particle. Consider the following examples from the Oslo Multilingual Corpus:

(1) “Oh,” she said. “You’re not married” “Well, I am, but she’s . . . living elsewhere” (ATI)

(2) A great deal would depend, she knew, on whom she saw . . . luck . . . Well, she had been lucky before. And besides, what she was suggesting was reasonable . . . (DL2TNL)

(3) “Talk of the devil,” says Frank. “Well, here you are: Paul—Andrea.” (ABRITNL)

(4) “Don’t worry,” said Beverley. “They don’t come in the houses. Well, not often. They’ve got their own complex at the bottom of the gardens.” (STITNL)

In (1) the second speaker needs to resolve the divergence between A’s expectations and his own. In example (2) the divergence is between the voice heard in the first proposition (which raises a difficulty) and the one represented in the second sentence (which dismisses the problem). In this case the two voices belong to the same person and they are engaged in an interior dialogue. In (3) the divergence is between the speaker’s own expectations and the actual situation he or she is confronted with. The pragmatic marker signals to the hearer that what is to follow is somehow incongruous from the speaker’s point of view. In (4) well signals that the previous utterance may lead to the wrong expectations, which have to be corrected.

What well does in all four cases is signal something like “knowing this, accepting this as a starting point, there is something else I want to say”. This is what we define as the core meaning of well, namely, acceptance. It will be noted that this is very close to the meaning ascribed to well by Fischer (2000a), who formulates it as “after all I know about it I think this.” We want to go one step further and ask why speakers want to express this meaning at particular points in the discourse. We have concluded from our research that the multifunctionality of well arises from the fact that speakers may express acceptance of a previous statement or of a situation for different purposes: to initiate a conclusion, a disagreement, or a surprise, to name only a few. In all cases, however, the speakers attend to heterogeneity in different forms: other possible expectations, other possible conclusions, other possible reactions. Next to the core meaning (“acceptance”) it is therefore useful to posit a strategic function shared by all pragmatic uses within a heteroglossic framework. This strategic function, encompassing the many more specific context-bound uses, can be described as positioning the utterance vis-a-vis the hearer’s real or suspected expectations. This general strategic function is what well shares with other markers in the field, such as actually, in fact, as a matter of fact (see Smith and Jucker, 2000, on the differences between actually and other markers with similar functions).

6. The Translation Method

We agree with many authors that conversational analysis is the best basic methodology for studying the function of pragmatic markers. However, it is generally difficult to describe the pragmatic properties or functions of words and utterances. We would, therefore, argue that additional methods of a more experimental type can yield deeper insights or provide answers to questions that cannot be easily answered based on conversation analysis alone. Fischer (2000a) has shown that varying the communicative situation in an experimentally controlled way leads to differences in the occurrence and use of certain pragmatic markers. This seems to provide a productive way to test hypotheses about the dimensions of the communicative situation that the markers relate to. In our contribution, we suggest an additional methodology that uses parallel translation corpora of two or more languages.

The idea that translation corpora can be a valuable tool for exploring phenomena in a source language has been convincingly defended in a number of publications (e.g., the articles in Johansson and Öksøjell, 1998; Hasselgård and Öksøjell, 1999; and Ajimer and Simon-Vandenbergen, forthcoming; see also Dyvik, 1998, 1999; Noël, 2003). The case is especially strong in the study of pragmatic markers precisely because of their underspecified core meaning and their polysemous nature. Translations of pragmatic markers can therefore serve as a heuristic for discovering contextual dimensions or for making more fine-grained divisions in these dimensions, because the translations force one to account for the contextual factors that lead to particular choices. However, we might ask whether we can rely on translations to reveal the cross-linguistic correspondences. Translations are rarely literal renderings of the originals, but rather reflect properties of either the source or target language. It is obvious that there are a variety of reasons for a particular translation to be selected. Translators do not translate words and constructions in isolation but rather choose a correspondence for a linguistic element in a particular context. It follows that which words or constructions we regard as correspondences between languages ultimately depends on the analyst’s own judgement.

Moreover, in the area of pragmatic markers it is particularly difficult to know what we should consider a tertium comparationis, or common ground. We believe therefore that it is important to start with a hypothesis of a core meaning, based on what we perceive to be the similarities between the different translations of a discourse particle. In this way, the translations become a heuristic for arriving at a tertium comparationis by allowing us to check the hypothesized core meaning and, if necessary, to refine it (Altenberg and Granger, 2002: 16). By looking at translations into a single language, we establish unidirectional correspondences. Translations into multiple languages are interesting.
because they show the closeness of target items to each other (see Fischer, 2000a) and have what Dyvik (1998: 72) refers to as overlapping translational properties.

Ajimer and Simon-Vandenbergen (2003) used translations into Swedish and Dutch to describe the polysemy of the English discourse particle well. They assumed that if a particular meaning of well was mirrored in a translation (into Swedish or Dutch) it should be explained by the monolingual analysis of the core meaning of well. The polysemous nature of well was illustrated by the large number of translations into the target language (50 translations into Swedish and 35 translations into Dutch; Ajimer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003). For example, well was often translated as a response particle ja (‘yes’), constituting 12% of the cases in the Sweden Parallel Corpus. Because of its frequency, ja represents a prototypical translation of well. However, ja may also be used in contexts where well could not be used. For instance, ja is also a backchannel item, and it can be the answer to a yes/no question. Other functions are more specific and context-dependent. In both the Swedish and the Dutch material, one could distinguish translations focussing on emotion (ja, nja) rather than simple acceptance (ja ‘yes’).

Parallel translation corpora make it possible to reverse the translation process. A translation equivalent of item X in language B can be studied in relation to its source equivalents in language A. In other words, if X is translated by Y, we would expect Y to have X as a potential source. The functional equivalents (bidirectional equivalents, since they hold in both directions) can be assigned a correspondence value. In the unlikely case that an item always corresponds to another item in the compared language, the intertranslatability value would be 100% (Altenberg, 1999: 254). However, discourse particles are not expected to reach a high degree of intertranslatability.

On the basis of the cross-linguistic method, we can also establish semantic fields in two or more languages. A semantic field is defined by Dyvik (1998: 72) as “a large, vague potential 'sense' which is not necessarily the sense of one sign, but rather the joint 'sense' of a set of semantically related signs”. In order to conclude that two items belong to the same semantic field, it is not sufficient to look at translations in one direction only; one must go back and forth from sources to targets. If item X in language A is translated by Y and Z in language B, one can, by using B as source language, look for translation equivalents of Y and Z (see also Ebeling, 2000: 17-18). This procedure will allow us to show how the pragmatic marker X is related to other pragmatic markers, or to other linguistic items such as modal particles or response words, in the same language.

A cross-linguistic analysis is needed to establish links between meanings in the languages compared and to establish language-internal relations between elements in the source language. The contrastive method also emphasises the need to explain how the core meaning of pragmatic markers can explain the translations in the languages we have contrasted with English. Fischer (this volume) points out that no matter how many functions one finds it useful to distinguish, one has to be able to establish a link with their core meaning. As Fischer notes, this entails that the range of functions carried by any particular item is not arbitrary. Although some of the functions will also be fulfilled by other pragmatic markers, one must be able to explain the difference between markers in terms of their core meanings.

The frequent translations of well by response signals such as ja show that agreement is very much part of the meaning of well. This confirms that the core meaning of well is acceptance. On the other hand, it is clear that well has lost much of its meaning and can be used to take stock of the situation when agreement must be sought in order to re-establish common ground or when there is actual disagreement. The heteroglossic perspective explains the fact that a marker of acceptance can be used strategically or different interpersonal functions, including persuasion or politeness.

7. Conclusion

Particle research, which studies one of the most elusive aspects of natural language, clearly struggles with a number of problems simultaneously: terminological, theoretical, and methodological. Terminological work that is aware of the delicate balance between functional and formal distinctions is still necessary. In this paper we have proposed to take the functional view as a point of departure but to use both functional and formal criteria for further subclassification. It is desirable, in order to arrive at a clearer picture of this area of research, that researchers be explicit about the basis for their choice of terms.

On the theoretical level we need to create a framework that can accommodate the full complexity of the function of pragmatic markers. We have proposed that reflexivity, indexicality, and heteroglossia play a central role in a theoretical framework for pragmatic markers. Reflexivity as a necessary property of pragmatic markers relates the item in question to the utterance itself. Indexicality is optional but is a characteristic of the more prototypical pragmatic markers. It relates the item to the context. Finally, all pragmatic markers are heteroglossic in that they are strategies for positioning an utterance in the context of other utterances, in either real or imagined discourse. Heteroglossia is thus the characteristic which relates pragmatic markers to the hearer.

Finally, a broad range of methodologies is required to uncover the meaning and function of markers. Both natural and experimental data are needed. Specifically, we believe that comparing translations of a text in different languages can help to reveal the meaning of markers which might be less accessible in a monolingual approach. The translation method is useful not only in light of the need to move on to typological questions (how do languages resemble and differ in this area?) but is also useful as a heuristic for establishing contrastive semantic-pragmatic fields. Through closer study of such fields we may arrive at insights into the question of multifunctionality and how it relates to semantic and pragmatic polysemy. We have suggested in this paper that at least for some pragmatic markers, it is desirable to define a core meaning and a general strategic function in a heteroglossic framework. More empirical work on pragmatic markers in different languages is needed, however, in order to test the explanatory power of the model proposed here.

Notes

1 See Weydt, this volume, his thesis 4: “Every particle can be assigned a constant basic meaning”.

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Chapter 7

The description of text relation markers in the Geneva model of discourse organization

Eddy Roulet

1. Introduction

The problem of the description of the formal and functional range of discourse markers or particles is so complex that I can treat it here only from a specific point of view, which is slightly different from those of most papers in this volume, i.e., the elaboration of a global model of the complexity of the organization of discourse, a model "which provides a place to locate DMs within" (as opposed to models "whose only purpose is to explain what DMs are", to use Pons Borderia’s terms, this volume). On the other hand, I will not go deeply into the problem of the description of the core procedural meaning of discourse markers or particles, which has been treated for French by Ducrot (Ducrot et al., 1980) and Rossari (1994, 2000, this volume).

In my paper, after a brief presentation of the approach, methodology, and data, I will propose (i) a definition of text structure and constituents, (ii) a definition of a subset of discourse markers or particles which I call text relation markers (henceforth TRMs), (iii) a description of a restricted set of generic text relations (henceforth TRs), and (iv) a procedure for computing the specific TRs linking text constituents to information in discourse memory according to the instructions given by TRMs. It seems to me that points (i) and (ii) have been neglected too long in the study of discourse markers or particles.

1.1. Approach

Our approach may be characterized as interactionist, top-down, comprehensive, modular and heuristic. It is interactionist and top-down following Bakhtin’s well-known conception: "the methodologically based order of study of language ought to be: (1) the forms and types of verbal interaction in connection with their concrete conditions; (2) forms of particular utterances, of particular speech performances, as elements of closely linked interaction—i.e., the genres of speech performance in human behavior and ideological creativity as determined by verbal interaction; (3) a reexamination, on this