ON TEACHING DISCOURSE MARKERS

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Some words and phrases help to develop ideas and relate them to one another. These kinds of words and phrases are often called discourse markers. It must be noted that most of these discourse markers are formal and used when speaking in a formal context or when presenting complicated information in writing.

Primarily we are interested in the pragmatic and semantic properties of these things, but occasionally we produce spin-offs for language teaching purposes as well, since they are an important and neglected compo-

nent of pragmatic competence in language. Our main issues of linguistic interest include:

1. Semantic and pragmatic properties of particles and connectives, leading eventually, someday, to a well developed linguistic model of these items.
2. How they might affect psycholinguistic processing of language, as measured, for example, in reaction time experiments and comprehensions experiments.
3. How they differ cross-linguistically, and how cross-linguistic differences might shed light on their semantic/pragmatic properties.
4. How they affect or participate in information structure of language, and how they inform more sophisticated theories of information structure beyond the simple new/old information distinction.
5. How their use might be affected by or play a role in social cognitive aspects of language use.
6. Their historical pragmatic development in the language.
7. What sentence-initial and sentence-final markers can show us about the properties of the left and right peripheries of sentences?

So, than like what are discourse markers? Well, depending on what kind of linguists we read, this label encompasses one of two types of lexical items.

1. Discourse particles: extra syntactic particles, i.e., items that don't fit into normal categories of function words, and don't really form or belong to a typical syntactic constituent. These often occur sentence initially, and sometimes sentence finally or before certain types of constituents within a sentence. These include:
   - Pause markers or hesitatives – *uh, uhm, er,*
   - Information management markers – indicating that something is new to the speaker, that the speaker believes something is new/old/inferable to the listener, etc., such as *you know, gee, gosh, I mean*.
   - "Expectation" markers – indicating responses that are contrary to expectation, including unexpected topic shifts, such as *now, well*.
   - Sentence final particles in Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and other languages, such as interrogative, suggestive, and tag question particles (e.g., Mandarin *ma, ba, ne*).
   - The common colloquial particle *like*, especially among younger people, which is often treated as a focus marker (for new or contrastive information) or a hedge marker (pragmatic "softener").

2. Discourse connectives: conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, and other structures that connect sentential units and thoughts (excluding temporal and irrealis conjunctions such as *if, when, unless, before...*).