A Pre-Requisite to Socializing Non-Native Learners Into Discourse Markers Use

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ABSTRACT *The mastery in foreign language acquisition is achieved not only by appropriateness and fluency but also by socializing non-native speakers into the strategies of target language use. The present paper focuses on discourse markers (DMs) as widely discussed communicatively-regulative units of language (Leech, 1984), and approaches them as overt language manifestations of interpersonal and textual metafunctions (Halliday, 2009). A brief outline of a theoretical 'roadmap' will be followed by a survey of parameters found relevant for socializing Czech university students of English into appropriate use of DMs. Though there is nothing compared to native speakers' tacit knowledge, a reasonable step to sounding more English-like in this domain can be achieved by learning more about the subsystem of language to which DMs belong, the mechanism of their distribution in discourse and the strategies of their use, as emergent from language corpora.*

INTRODUCTION
Theoretical Framework
In this paper, two key notions of applied linguistics, i.e. *language* and *social interaction* (Young, 2008, p. 3) will be considered a springboard to a better understanding of the role of discourse markers (DMs), such as *well, oh, ah, now, I think, you know, I mean* in text/discourse. Since there is a lack of argument on definitions of both text and discourse, we will follow Halliday's (2009, p. 247) stance, i.e. that 'the two terms refer to the same thing, but with a difference of emphasis.' Discourse, in Halliday's view, is a text viewed in socio-cultural context, while text is discourse viewed as a process of language.

As for the concept of *language* in general, and *language use* in particular, our search was guided by the theoretical framework of a functional and systemic grammar, as advocated by The Linguistic School of Prague (cf. Vachek, 1966) and other scholars whose approach is close to the Praguian model (Leech, 1984, Halliday, 2009). Within this framework, each item of the language system is perceived as belonging to a particular subsystem within the overall organization of language, and its functional load is defined in relation to other compatible items within that subsystem.

The concept of *social interaction* subsumes (i) Goffman's (1955) notion of *facework* with the dual strategy not to lose – in the process of interaction – one's own face and not to threaten the face of the other; and (ii) Halliday's (1984) conception of language as *social semiotic* – based on interpreting language as a medium through which its learners are adapted during their lifetime to socio-cultural norms, values but also strategies of acting as members of a 'society' (p. 9). Since the process of socialization does not 'happen by instructions' but rather 'through the accumulated experience of numerous small events' (Halliday, 1984, p. 9) there is no wonder that the socialization into regulative strategies underlying DMs use is a demanding process finding not much support in ELT materials.

Previous research
The present paper claims authority to all those who have extended Schiffrin's (1987) original model in various directions, e.g. by identifying more items meeting the criteria of DMs, more perspectives from which to tackle DMs, or by applying more delicate taxonomies facilitated by language corpora. In this paper, however, I refrain from surveys of individual approaches, since my primary focus is on common properties assigned to DMs as a subclass of discourse signposts used to regulate various facets of discourse.

A Top-down Approach
Rather than following the current bottom-up routine of approaching individual DMs, this study, inspired by Halliday's *architecture of language* (Halliday & Webster, 2009, p. 231), looks at DMs from a *top-down perspective*, considering them as entities encapsulated into discourse due to the activation of *interpersonal* and textual *metafunctions* of the semantic system of language (Halliday & Webster, 2009). For their specification see Pre-requisites below. Having in mind that the top-down approach will take me on to more speculative grounds, I still find the global perspectivization more relevant for understanding DMs as devices manifesting Interpersonal Rhetoric (Leech, 1984, p. 131).

Advocating the Top-down Approach
The decision to approach DMs from a top-down perspective, i.e. as overt language manifestations of strategies in interpersonal and textual management, has emerged from my participation in various ELT conferences, in which university teachers of ESP programmes and ELT teacher trainers have reached a consensus that in the globalizing world, with English as a *lingua franca*, there has emerged a pressing need to intensify the way of familiarizing learners of English into the strategies of communicative manoeuvring typical of the target language use, since *what* is communicated is as important as *how* it is communicated, and *what* is achieved by it. Unfortunately, in spite of a relatively easy access to corpus data, many course-books suffer from the lack of authentic samples in which communicatively constitutive units (the semantic core of the message) would be presented as co-occurring in a complex interplay with the regulative units (including DMs). This can be partly explained by the already mentioned princi-

ple-controlled nature of DMs (Leech, 1984) and the consequent difficulties in elaborating a coherent methodology of their presentation, elucidation and application in classroom activities. Moreover the strategies of DMs use can vary from language to language, reflecting tradition-bound values and norms, age and gender preferences, and approaches to ritualized language. (Compare the corpus-data evidence of a stereotypical introduction of *well* in English, for which there is a variety of DMs used in the Czech translation to meet the Czech tendency of avoiding such stereotypes as stylistically improper.) Consequently, with no prior knowledge about the overall communicative potential of these small but effective 'social niceties', the ad hoc occurrence of DMs in non-native learners' interaction can easily turn out to become a cheap approximation to sounding English-like. This is even more striking if we read in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001, p. 122) that with the C2.1 level of English, which is the level of a prospective teacher of English, the user 'appreciates fully the sociolinguistic and sociocultural implications of language used by native speakers and can react accordingly.'

Narrowing the scope
For the purposes of compiling a methodological 'toolkit' aimed to socialize Czech prospective teachers and university students of EFL classes to the strategies underlying DMs use, the repertory of DMs was restricted to those that had emerged from the BNC data as *discourse openers*, with the most frequent tokens *well, now, oh* and *ah*.

PRE-REQUISITES TO A TOP-DOWN APPROACH
Familiarizing students with metafunctions in the system of language

Our starting point on the imaginary roadmap from metafunctions to DMs is the presupposed existence of metafunctions and their types. Halliday & Webster (2009) distinguish three metafunctions in the system of language and refer to them as *ideational, interpersonal,* and *textual.* Put briefly, the *ideational* concerns the content of our messages and the ways it can be shaped as a semantic representation of events, states, participants in those events, location in time and space; the *interpersonal* subsumes the interlocutors' projection of attitudes, values, judgements into the message, while the *textual metafunction* focuses on information packaging and the ways information can be staged for the addressee. In our roadmap, the focus is on the *interpersonal metafunction* and its projection into discourse by means of DMs.

Projection of metafunctions: principles and strategies
The metafunctions are projected into discourse through *principles of interaction.* The core of these principles is subsumed under Grice's (1975, pp. 45-6) *Cooperative principle* and Leech's (1984, p. 149) *Politeness Principle.* Since both these principles are pre-requisites to any serious research into discourse properties, this study will take them for granted.

The choice of language devices used to manifest interpersonal metafunction is filtered in the course of interaction by *communicative strategies,* understood with Enkvist (1987, p. 24) as '*a goal-oriented weighting of decision-affecting factors*', in which the goal is to optimize interaction. These strategies can be projected into discourse by a whole battery of structurally heterogeneous but functionally comparable devices, known as gambits, discourse markers, hedges, and many more, referred to in Válková (2012)

as *discourse signposts.*

The following Fig.1 will elucidate our virtual roadmap, in which DMs are subsumed under discourse signposts.

Fig.1 Projection of Interpersonal Metafunction into Text/Discourse

Characterizing DMs
Formally, DMs represent a heterogeneous group ranging from single units (*well, oh, now, actually*) to phrases (*in a nutshell, in fact*), non-finite clauses (*to cut the long story short, to tell you the truth*) and finite clauses (*you know, you see*). Our target group of DMs (*well, now, oh* and *ah*) falls into the single unit type.

Unlike the authors associating each discourse marker with an *inherent meaning potential* (cf. *well* as marker of response, *oh* as a marker of information management in Schiffrin, 1987), I opted for *multifunctionality*, claiming that each DM is endowed with the '*archefunction*', i.e. to regulate discourse, which is molded by context into more specific meanings (hesitation marker, pacifier, topic shifter) so that the final meaning is a played out result of an on-line process of negotiation. The distribution of DMs is *relatively flexible* but with some of them, there are some restrictions (cf. the initiating gambits). One of the advantages of corpus data is that we are faced not only with the distribution of single DMs but also their co-occurrences in chains (clusters).

Processing strategies: activation of vertical and horizontal axes
When socializing learners into DMs use, it is essential to activate two axes in authentic data processing: the *vertical axis of alternation* (cf. the alternative choice within the spectrum of DMs used to initiate the utterance, such as *Well/Now/Oh/Ah*), and the horizontal axis of mutual co-occurrence within the selected group, (e.g. *Oh well/Well now/Now well/Oh well well*), or in co-occurrence with other left-periphery discourse signposts, such as *discourse connectives* (*And/But/Or*), *markers of cognition* (*I think/I mean*), and *markers of personal involvement* (*You know/You see*), cf.

But I mean you see the problem is…[BNC KM6(1050)]
Expressions of *agreement* and *disagreement* and *interjections* can also be integrated into the left-periphery discourse signposts, as in

Oh yes, oh gosh, yes, well the problem is... [BNC KDM 8320]

Since the four alternating gambits, i.e. *well, now, oh,* and *ah*, can mutually co-occur, I traced the frequency-based preferences in the BNC data. The in-group configurations, however, reflect only a language potential, which need not necessarily currently be met with, as the following BNC-based frequency survey shows:

Oh well (1533), Oh oh (369), Ah well (236), Ah ah (222), Well now (184), Well well (141), Oh now (26), Now now (16), Ah now(15), Well well well (15), Well ah (8), Now oh (6), Now well (6) (Válková 2012, p. 225)

CONCLUDING NOTES

This paper contains rather impulses to further activities than responses to research questions, since the current approach to discourse signposting has not yet received the systemic attention it deserves, neither in FL classroom instruction nor in teaching materials.

The toolkit presented here is looked upon as a pre-requisite to increasing learner's awareness to DMs as an integrated part of our everyday encounters. Though the focus was on left-periphery DMs, the procedure is applicable to quantitative and qualitative properties of other discourse signposts as well. Our pilot phase of implementation has proved increased awareness in the EFL learners to formal, functional and distributional properties of DMs in authentic communicative situations and the increased ability to apply the acquired competence to a more considerate performance in which awareness is but a step to appropriateness and adequacy.

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