

DISCOURSE MARKERS IN SPOKEN ACADEMIC ENGLISH

Tairova Shahnoza Bahromovna

*o'qituochi**O'zbekiston Davlat Jahon Tillari Universiteti**tshb3004@gmail.com*

Abstract: *Discourse markers are essential linguistic tools that contribute to coherence, interaction management, and pragmatic meaning in spoken academic English. They function beyond propositional content, guiding listeners through arguments, signaling relationships between ideas, and managing interpersonal dynamics in academic discourse. This article examines the role of discourse markers in spoken academic English, drawing on key theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. It explores how discourse markers such as however, well, you know, so, and actually function in lectures, seminars, and academic discussions. The study highlights their structural, cognitive, and interactional roles, and emphasizes their importance for both native and non-native speakers in higher education contexts.*

Keywords: *Discourse markers, spoken academic English, pragmatics, coherence, interactional language, lecture discourse, academic communication*

INTRODUCTION

Spoken academic English is a highly structured yet interactive form of communication used in universities, conferences, seminars, and lectures. Unlike written academic language, which is often carefully edited and fixed, spoken academic discourse is dynamic, spontaneous, and interactionally rich. One of the key features that supports this dynamic nature is the use of discourse markers.

Discourse markers are linguistic items that do not contribute directly to the propositional meaning of an utterance but serve important pragmatic and discourse-organizing functions. According to Schiffrin (1987), discourse markers are “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk.” They help speakers organize their speech, manage turns, and guide listeners through complex information.

In academic contexts, discourse markers are particularly important because they help lecturers and students structure arguments, highlight important ideas, and maintain coherence in extended spoken discourse. As Hyland (2005) argues, academic communication is not only about presenting information but also about engaging listeners in meaning-making processes.

This article explores the use of discourse markers in spoken academic English, focusing on their functions, types, and pedagogical implications.

Literature Review. The study of discourse markers has developed across several linguistic traditions, including discourse analysis, pragmatics, and conversation analysis.

Schiffrin (1987) was among the first to provide a comprehensive framework for discourse markers, identifying items such as *well*, *so*, *and*, *because*, and *you know* as crucial for structuring talk. She emphasized their role in coherence and discourse organization.

Fraser (1999) later refined the definition, describing discourse markers as lexical expressions that signal a relationship between two discourse segments. He categorized them into contrastive (*however*, *on the other hand*), inferential (*so*, *therefore*), elaborative (*in fact*, *for example*), and temporal (*then*, *finally*) markers.

In academic discourse specifically, Hyland (2005) highlights the role of metadiscourse, which includes discourse markers that help writers and speakers guide readers and listeners. He distinguishes between interactive metadiscourse (helping organize information) and interactional metadiscourse (engaging the audience).

Carter and McCarthy (2006) emphasize that spoken academic English relies heavily on discourse markers to manage real-time processing, repair speech, and maintain listener engagement. Similarly, Biber et al. (1999) show that academic spoken registers differ significantly from written ones in their frequency and function of discourse markers.

More recent research has focused on non-native speakers' use of discourse markers in academic settings. Fung and Carter (2007) found that learners often underuse discourse markers, which can affect fluency and coherence in academic presentations.

MAIN PART

Discourse markers are typically short, syntactically detachable linguistic items that function at the discourse level rather than the sentence level. They do not change the truth conditions of a statement but add pragmatic meaning.

For example:

Well, I think this theory is valid.

So, we can conclude that the results are significant.

In both cases, *well* and *so* do not contribute to propositional meaning but signal attitude, reasoning, or transition.

Fraser (1999) emphasizes that discourse markers are context-dependent and multifunctional, meaning their interpretation relies heavily on discourse context.

There are the following types of Discourse Markers in Spoken Academic English.

1. Additive Markers. These markers add information or expand ideas. In lectures, teachers often use additive markers to build complex explanations. The examples are *and, moreover, in addition, also*.

2. Contrastive Markers. These indicate opposition or contradiction. Such markers are essential in academic argumentation. The examples are *however, but, on the other hand, nevertheless*.

3. Inferential Markers. These show cause-effect or logical conclusions. These are highly frequent in scientific and analytical discourse. The examples are *so, therefore, thus, as a result*.

4. Elaborative Markers. These provide clarification or examples. The examples are *for example, in other words, that is, namely*.

5. Interactional Markers. These manage speaker-listener interaction. These are particularly common in spoken academic English because they reflect real-time thinking. The examples are *well, you know, I mean, actually*.

Discourse Markers in Spoken Academic English have numerous functions.

1. Coherence and Cohesion. Discourse markers help organize spoken discourse into coherent units. Without them, academic speech may sound fragmented or difficult to follow (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). For example, markers like *firstly, secondly, and finally* structure lectures clearly.

2. Cognitive Processing. Spoken academic language is produced in real time. Discourse markers allow speakers to plan and think while speaking.

Well... let me think... this approach might not be suitable.

Here, well functions as a hesitation and planning marker.

3. Interpersonal Engagement. Markers such as *you know, I mean, and actually* help lecturers connect with students. Hyland (2005) notes that interactional metadiscourse creates a sense of dialogue even in monologic speech.

4. Emphasis and Attitude. Discourse markers can signal emphasis or speaker stance.

Actually, this is a very important finding.

Here, actually highlights significance and corrects assumptions.

5. Discourse Markers in Lectures and Seminars. In lectures, discourse markers are often used to guide large-scale structure:

Today we will discuss three main theories... firstly... secondly... finally...

In seminars, where interaction is higher, discourse markers are more dialogic:

Well, I think your point is interesting, but I disagree because...

Students also use discourse markers to participate in discussions, though non-native speakers may struggle with natural usage patterns (Fung & Carter, 2007).

Non-native speakers often face difficulties in using discourse markers effectively in academic settings. Common issues include:

- Overuse of basic markers (and, so)
- Underuse of interactional markers (well, I mean)
- Incorrect placement in sentences

As a result, their spoken academic English may sound less fluent or less natural. Training in discourse markers has been shown to improve fluency, coherence, and perceived academic competence (Mauranen, 2004).

Teaching discourse markers should be an integral part of academic English instruction. Effective strategies include:

- Explicit teaching of categories and functions
- Listening to authentic lectures and identifying markers
- Role-play in seminars and discussions
- Recording and analyzing student speech

Hyland (2005) emphasizes that awareness-raising activities help learners understand not just forms, but pragmatic functions.

CONCLUSION

Discourse markers play a crucial role in spoken academic English by ensuring coherence, managing interaction, and facilitating cognitive processing. They function as essential tools for structuring lectures, engaging students, and expressing speaker attitudes. The literature shows that both native and non-native speakers rely on discourse markers, although their usage patterns differ significantly. Understanding and teaching discourse markers is vital for improving academic communication skills, especially in higher education contexts where spoken interaction is central. Future research may further explore cross-cultural differences and the impact of digital academic communication on discourse marker usage.

REFERENCES:

1. Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Longman.
2. Carter, R., & McCarthy, M. (2006). *Cambridge grammar of English*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31(7), 931–952.



4. Fung, L., & Carter, R. (2007). Discourse markers and spoken English: Native and learner use. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(3), 410–439.
5. Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. Longman.
6. Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.
7. Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse markers*. Cambridge University Press.