

# ***TWO ACCOUNTS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN ENGLISH***

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## **Abstract**

This paper is a scrutiny of the semantics and pragmatics of discourse markers in English. It discusses two accounts in the analysis of discourse markers, namely the Coherence account and the Relevance account. The paper investigates the similarities and differences between the two accounts and concludes by arguing that the Relevance account is an ideal account and more appropriate for analysing discourse markers than the Coherence one. The paper is organised as follows: section 1 is a general introduction. Section 2 discusses the coherence-based account of discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987; Giora 1997, 1998 and Fraser 1988, 1990). This account argues that discourse markers play a crucial role in the interpretation of discourse by signalling coherence relations between discourse units. Section 3 investigates the relevance-based account of DMs (Blakemore 1987, 1992, 2002; Regina Blass 1990; Corrine Iten 1998 and Wilson and Sperber 1993). These researchers argue that discourse markers are indicators and procedures that constrain the inferential part of the utterance interpretation by guiding the hearer/reader to recognise the intended cognitive effect with the least processing effort. Section 4 gives an evaluation of the two accounts and favours the relevance account which considers discourse as a cognitive rather than linguistic entity. Section 5 is a conclusion

## **1. Introduction**

Discourse markers have been much studied in the last twenty years; different proposals and approaches have been developed on this subject. Fraser (1999) refers to their problematic and controversial nature. He points out that discourse markers (DMs henceforth) have been studied by different researchers under different labels. Fraser maintains that researchers have agreed that DMs are lexical expressions that relate discourse segments, but they have disagreed on how they are defined and what functions they carry.

Schourup (1999) expresses similar views. He argues that there is disagreement on fundamental issues in the study of DMs. Researchers are unable to agree on the grammatical category of DMs or how to delimit their class or even what types of meaning these markers express.

In this paper, my purpose is to give a detailed analysis of the main approaches and proposals adopted in studying DMs in the last 20 years and highlight the similarities and differences between these proposals. I classify the researchers of DMs into two groups. The first group includes researchers who adopt a coherence-based account. The main figures of this group are Schiffrin (1987), Fraser (1988, 1990), Redeker (1990, 1991), Zwicky (1985) and Giora (1997, 1998). The second includes the researchers who base their study and analysis of DMs on Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theory. This group includes Blakemore (1987, 1992, 2002), Regina Blass (1990) Corrine Iten (1998) and Wilson and Sperber (1993).

This paper highlights the dispute between the two groups regarding different issues in the study and analysis of DMs. The major issue, in my opinion, is how the use of DMs contributes to discourse interpretation. Researchers in the coherence group argue that DMs play a major role in the interpretation of the text by signalling 'coherence' relations between discourse units. In other words, the interpretation of a text, according to the coherence group, depends on the identification of coherence relations between the units of that text (Schourup, 1999: 240).

As for researchers in the relevance group, they consider DMs as indicators or procedures that constrain the inferential phase of utterance interpretation by guiding the process of utterance interpretation and offering clues that enable the hearer/reader to recognize the intended cognitive effect with the least processing effort (Blakemore, 2000: 464). In short, the coherence group looks at DMs as linguistic devices that maintain coherence in the text through linking its units, whereas the relevance group considers such markers as pragmatic devices that constrain the relevance of discourse units.

It will become clear, towards the end of this paper, that I favour the relevance-theoretic approach over the coherence-based one. It will be concluded that 'coherence' is replaced by 'relevance' which is a cognitive, not a linguistic, concept. The essential difference between 'coherence' and 'relevance' is that the latter considers discourse as a cognitive entity. It will be also concluded that the well-formedness of discourse is not a matter of 'coherence' but of 'relevance'. In other words, 'relevance' will be offered as an alternative to 'coherence' in discourse interpretation.

In addition to the above primary difference between the two groups, this paper also investigates some other sub-differences concerning the semantic, pragmatic and structural status and functions of DMs. The investigation also tackles the disagreement between researchers in the same group. For instance, some researchers in the coherence group argue for a unified grammatical category for DMs (Zwicky 1985), some others do not (Schiffrin 1987). Some researchers claim that DMs have semantic (core) meaning (Murray, 1979) and (Bolinger 1989), some others claim that they do not (Schiffrin 1987). And, among researches of the relevance group, there is disagreement whether their meaning is conceptual or procedural and whether they contribute to the implicit or explicit interpretation of utterances. Blakemore (1987) argues that DMs are lexical expressions which do not contribute to the truth conditional content of utterances in which they occur. The main function of these markers is to constrain the implicit side of utterance interpretation.

## **2. Coherence-based account of discourse markers**

### **2.1. What is coherence?**

Halliday and Hasan (1976) point out that coherence is what makes the text semantically well-formed. When two sentences cohere, a semantic relationship holds between them. Werth (1984:60) points out that the well-formedness of discourse is achieved through 'connectivity' which is realised in four forms; 'cohesion', 'collocation', 'connectors' and 'coherence'. Werth argues that these four forms are ultimately the same in the sense that the first three are subsumed under the fourth. Let us forget about 'collocation' and 'connectors' for a while and concentrate on 'coherence' and 'cohesion'. It seems that there is interrelation between these two concepts. Coherence is an umbrella under which cohesion operates. Cohesion is one of

the linguistic devices that contributes to the coherence of a certain text through the syntactic process of interconnecting the sentences of this text. Halliday and Hasan (1976) point out that the concept of 'cohesion' accounts for the semantic relationships through which a certain passage of speech or writing become a text. According to them, cohesion can have the following forms: co-reference, ellipsis, and conjunction as illustrated in (a), (b) and (c) respectively:

- (a) John visited me yesterday. He is my closet friend.
- (b) Would you like to have more tickets to the party? I have ten left.
- (c) He is in the garden, but I cannot see him.

Halliday and Hasan (1976:1) provide a comprehensive discussion of the notion of cohesion. They point out that cohesion is a set of different linguistic devices through which one can judge whether a certain sequence of sentences is a text or not. If sentences maintain semantic relationships between each other through the use of some cohesive devices, then these sentences would form a text.

This makes the notion of cohesion very crucial to the term 'texture'. The texture of a certain passage of sentences is achieved through the presence of some cohesive relations between the sentences of this passage. Consider an example:

- (1) I have bought some **pens**. I gave **three** of **them** to my brother.

As can be noticed, the sentences in (1) cohere; there is a cohesive relationship between them represented by the anaphoric reference where 'pens', 'three' and 'them' refer to the same object.

Halliday and Hasan (1976:5) argue that cohesion can be achieved partly through grammar and partly through vocabulary. This can result in having two different types of cohesion: 'grammatical cohesion' and 'lexical cohesion'. The famous examples of grammatical cohesion are those achieved through linking (connecting) linguistic expressions or DMs such as *and*, *or*, *but*, *yet*, *now*, *then*, *however* and *after all*. Consider the example below:

- (2) a. He has got a very good mark in the math test.  
b. **And** he has been the first in his class for the last two years (additive).  
c. **Yet** he failed his syntax test this term (adversative).  
d. **Now**, he feels very frustrated and thinks of leaving school (temporal).

The linking words in (2) are cohesive devices that express semantic relationships between the sentences as illustrated. As for lexical cohesion, it can be achieved through devices such as 'repletion' and 'reiteration'. Consider the following example in which lexical cohesion is achieved through the repetition of the word *woman* and the synonymy of the word *mother*.

- (3) There was a great **woman**, who used to look after me when I was a kid. She used to feed me, play with me and tell me nice stories. The **woman** was my **mother**.

Halliday and Hasan (1976:8) argue that cohesive relations go beyond the sentence structure. They could be identified within a sentence or between sentences in a certain text. Cohesive relations are semantic relations between an element of the text and another element that is crucial to its interpretation regardless of grammatical or structural boundaries. Suppose that we pick a novel (written text), turn randomly to a page and read the following:

(4) **They think so.**

As an element of a text, the sentence in (4) could not be interpreted alone. As readers, we have to go back and search for some referents to *they* and *so*. In other words, we have to identify the elements that semantically match (and cohere with) the present elements. This leads Halliday and Hasan to the following account of cohesion:

The concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as a text. Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by resource to it. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text.

(Halliday and Hasan: 1976:4)

It is clear from the above quotation that Halliday and Hassan (1976:27) consider 'cohesion' as part of the linguistic system. For them, 'cohesion' is responsible for text-forming (texture or well-formedness). They view cohesive devices such as 'co-reference', 'substitution', 'ellipsis' and 'conjunction' as linguistic tools that semantically link elements which are structurally unrelated.

In this paper, I argue that the well-formedness of text is not achieved by coherence which is signalled by linguistic means. It is rather achieved pragmatically through the establishment of relevance relations between discourse units. I also argue that the linking 'connecting' words are not linguistic tools that contribute to the interpretation of text through expressing cohesive relations between elements of discourse, but rather pragmatic markers that contribute to the interpretation of text through controlling relevance relations between discourse units. Before introducing this argument, let us introduce two coherence-based accounts of DMs, namely Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser (1988):

## **2.2. Schiffrin's account of discourse markers.**

The industry of DMs has flourished at least since the year (1987). Three proposals were developed at roughly the same time; Schiffrin (1987), Blakemore (1987) and Fraser (1988). This section explores Schiffrin's proposal of DMs.

Schiffrin (1987) presents a very detailed analysis of some linguistic expressions in English which she calls DMs. She studies the semantic and grammatical status of these markers, their functions and characteristics. Being one of the leading figures in the coherence group, Schiffrin maintains that DMs contribute to the coherence of the text by establishing coherence relationships between units of talk (Schiffrin, 1987: 9).

Schiffrin's analysis of DMs shares some views with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) analysis of the cohesive devices in English. Halliday and Hasan argue that there are linguistic expressions in English, such as 'pronouns', 'conjunctions' and 'adverbs' that have cohesion functions. These expressions indicate links between two parts within the text. Schiffrin agrees with Halliday and Hasan that such expressions indicate that the interpretation of one clause is determined by the information derived from the prior clause.

Both Schiffrin (1987) and Halliday and Hasan (1976) agree that DMs should be considered as linguistic devices that link adjacent units of talk to make the whole discourse coherent. Schiffrin proposes that DMs play a cohesive role in the sense that they relate informational units in the present discourse with informational units in the prior discourse; this kind of coherence achieved by DMs is known as *local coherence* in Schiffrin's framework. It is local in the sense that DMs link two adjacent units in the text (or indicate coherence relationships between two adjacent utterances in discourse). Local coherence will be contrasted with Giora's (1979) global coherence later in this paper. For the time being, I will concentrate on some of the DMs markers studied by Schiffrin and show what coherence relationships they indicate and how they contribute to the interpretation of the text they are used in.

Schiffrin gives a detailed analysis of twelve DMs in English: *and, but, or, so, well, then, now, because, oh, well, y'know* and *I mean*. My purpose, here, is not to discuss all these DMs in detail, but rather investigate the functions (or coherence relations) achieved by such markers. The data that Schiffrin used to analyse these DMs are based on her sociolinguistic corpus which is composed of tape-recorded interviews with ordinary speakers. The data consist of long transcribed speech units taken from these interviews. I will use some of her examples for illustration.

Schiffrin maintains that DMs can function on different levels of discourse structure (linguistic or non-linguistic). They can operate on the 'ideational' (informational) structure in the sense that they indicate relations between ideas in discourse or in other words, they mark the organisation of ideas in discourse. For instance, a DM such as *but* indicates that what follows it contrasts with what precedes it. They can also operate on the participation framework (discourse exchange and interaction) in the sense that they play a role in controlling the conversational labour between speakers and hearers as is the case with *oh* and *well*.

My discourse model has both non-linguistic structures (exchange and actions) and linguistic structures (ideational). Speaker and hearer are related to each other, and to their utterances, in a participation framework. Their knowledge and meta-knowledge about ideas is organised and managed in an information state. Local coherence in discourse is thus defined as the outcome of joint efforts from interactants to integrate knowledge, meaning, saying and doing.

(Schiffrin 1987:29)

For example, Schiffrin argues that DMs such as *and, but, or, so* and *because* are operative on the ideational structure. Such markers can indicate three types of relations that contribute to the configuration of idea structures: cohesive relations, topic relations and functional relations. As for the other DMs, such as *well, oh, now, y'know* and *I mean*, they operate on the other levels: *exchange, action, participation framework* and

*information state*. Schiffrin (1987) argues that DMs contribute to the coherence of discourse through relating different components of talk in the sense that the interpretation of any component is dependent on the interpretation of the other.

Since coherence is the result of integration among different components of talk, any device which simultaneously locates an utterance within several emerging contexts of discourse automatically has an integrative function. That is, if a marker acts like an instruction to consider an upcoming utterance as speaker-focused on prior text within an information state, with a simultaneous instruction to view that utterance within a particular action structure, then the result is a type of integration between those components of talk.

(Schiffrin 1987: 330)

It can be noticed that Schiffrin views ‘discourse unit’ as a linguistic entity. She uses the term to refer to syntactic (structural) units such as ‘clauses’ and ‘phrases’ as well as ideational (informational) units such as ‘ideas’ and ‘opinions’. She has used the term interchangeably with other terms such as ‘discourse segment’, ‘unit of talk’ and ‘component of talk’. No matter what as discourse unit is called, it will be argued later in this paper that it is a cognitive rather than linguistic entity. In what follows, I give a brief summary of the functions and coherence relations expressed by the DMs in Schiffrin (1987).

### 2.2.1. ‘And’ and ‘but’

Schiffrin argues that these DMs operate on ideational structure. Contrary to Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) claim that conjunctions such as *and* and *or* express semantic relations between elements of discourse without having any structural role, Schiffrin assumes that they have both cohesive and structural roles; structural because they link two (or more) syntactic units such as clauses, phrases or verbs, and cohesive because the interpretation of the whole conjunctive utterance depends on the combination of both conjuncts. As for *and*, it can precede support units of talk (explanation, evidence and clarification to previous units). It can also have a pragmatic effect in the sense that it indicates a speaker’s continuation. However, *and* does not provide information about what is being continued. Such information is derived from the discourse content and structure (1987: 150). Consider Schiffrin’s example in which *and* is used to indicate the speaker’s continuation.

- (5) Debby: What made you decide t’come out here? Do y’remember?  
Ira: a. What made us decide t’come out here.  
b. Well uh we were looking in different neighbourhoods  
c. **and** then uh this was a Jewish community  
d. **and** we decided t’come out here  
e. Uh the-several of the communities we looked uh they weren’t-  
they weren’t Jewish.  
f. **and** we didn’t wanna live there  
g. Then we decide on Glenmore.

*But*, according to Schiffrin, indicates ‘adversative’ relations in discourse. It conveys contrast between two ideas or topics or it can be used to mark the denial of the speaker’s expectation of something:

- (6) She drives a Porsche, **but** her husband drives a Kia.
- (7) She is a lecturer of psychology at Oxford, **but** she does not know how to spell SCHIZOPHRENIA.

As can be noticed, *but* in (6) indicates that there is a contrast between two clauses ‘driving a Porsche’ and ‘driving a Kia’. It is true that both are cars. However, Porsche is a German manufacturer while Kia is a Korean one. In addition, Porsche is much more expensive than Kia which means that it will cost you more to drive a Porsche. As for *but* in (7), it indicates that there is a denial of expectation relation between the two clauses. Knowing how to spell the word SCHIZOPHRENIA would be an expectation of a lecturer of psychology at Oxford. However, this expectation is denied by the second clause.

### 2.2.2. ‘Because’ and ‘so’

These two DMs are operative on the ideational structure as well. They contribute to the coherence of discourse by signalling relations between discourse units. According to Schiffrin, *because* is used by the speaker to indicate a relation of ‘cause and result’, while *so* is used to indicate a relation of ‘premise and conclusion’. Consider the following examples:

- (8) [John did not go to school]<sub>Res</sub> **because** [was is sick]<sub>Cau</sub>.
- (9) [he was sick]<sub>Pre</sub>. **So** [he did not come to school]<sub>Conc</sub>.

In the sentence of (8), *because* indicates that the event ‘John did not go to school’ is a result of the event ‘John was sick’. *So* in (9) indicates that the event ‘he was sick’ is a ‘premise’ and the event ‘John did not go to school’ is a ‘conclusion’. More details will be given on these two DMs in the relevance-theoretic analysis.

### 2.2.3. ‘Now’ and ‘then’

These two DMs function on the ideational level of discourse structure. They indicate temporal relationships between units of talk. Schiffrin claims that *now* is used to indicate a speaker’s progression through a discourse which contains an ordered sequence of subordinating parts. It is also used to indicate the upcoming shift in talk, or when the speaker wants to negotiate the right to control what will happen next in talk (1987:241). Consider Schiffrin’s example in which Ira is discussing why he is against intermarriage. In this speech, Ira uses *now* to shift from recounting hypothetical events (a-d) in a narrative mode to interpreting them (e):

- (10) a. For example, eh...eh...let’s assume that husband’s a-w-a-a-a the husband’s Jewish ,  
b. and the girl’s, say, Catholic  
c. and they have an argument

- d. and she says ‘You goddam Jew!’
- c. **Now** she wouldn’t say something like that, if she was rational.

*Then* is used in discourse to indicate succession between prior and upcoming talk—a succession from one topic to another. Consider (11) in which the first two uses of *then* indicate a temporal succession between two events and the third one indicates a succession to a different topic.

- (11) I arrived at home very late this evening. I was exhausted. I took a hot bath, and **then** I had a light dinner. When I finished my dinner, I switched the TV on and watched my favourite programme, and **then** went to bed. I woke up very early in the morning because I heard some noise coming from the living room, **then** I remembered that I forgot to switch the TV off before I go to seep.

The main difference between *then* and *now* is the direction of discourse marked. *Now* points out forward in discourse time, while *then* points out backward. Moreover, there are some other differences between these two markers: unlike *now*, which is used as a time deictic providing temporal index in discourse time, *then* can be either deictic or anaphoric. As deictic, *then* indicates reference time, i.e. temporal relations between a linguistic event and speaking time, but as an anaphor, it marks temporal relations between two linguistic events (1987:246). Consider (12) and (13) in which *then* is used deictically and anaphorically respectively:

- (12) a. When did you submit your thesis?  
b. I submitted it **then**.
- (13) a. Are you going to see your supervisor during the Easter vacation?  
b. I will see him **then**.

#### 2.2.4. ‘Oh’ and ‘well’

These two markers are different from the markers discussed above in the sense that they operate on the interactional and informational level of discourse structure. Schiffrin presents *oh* as a marker of information management. It is used to indicate old information recognition and new information receipt, the replacement and redistribution of information and when locally provided information does not correspond to the speaker’s prior expectations. It is usually used in repairs, questions, answers and acknowledgements (1987: 90-95). *Oh* can have a pragmatic function; it is responsible for the division of turn-taking in the exchange structure. Thus, it plays a role in the participation framework as well. Schiffrin agrees with Heritage (1984) that *oh* is used to indicate that the speaker has undergone some kind of change in her locally current state of knowledge, information, orientation or awareness (1987: 99). Consider (14) and (15) in which *oh* indicates old information recognition and new information receipt respectively:

- (14) a. Did you invite your flatmate to attend your birthday party?  
b. **Oh** yeah, the Nigerian guy. Of course I did.

- (15) a. Do you know who the new prime minister is? He is Mr. Smith.  
 b. **Oh!**  
 c. He is my father's best friend.  
 d. **Oh!** But I did not hear that on TV.

*Well* is used as a response marker which anchors its user in an interaction when an upcoming contribution is not fully constant with prior coherence options. Schiffrin argues that *well* can have pragmatic function; it is used to indicate a request for elaboration and clarification (1987: 120). Consider the following example:

- (16) a. How did you get your new mobile? Was it a contract or pay as you go?  
 b. **Well** you mean the Nokia N95?

### 2.2.5. 'Y'know' and 'I mean'

These two markers are used on the informational level of discourse structure; they relate informational units in the present discourse with informational units in the previous discourse. Furthermore, they have functions in the participation framework. Schiffrin (1987:268) maintains that *y'know* has two discourse functions: a marker of meta-knowledge about what speakers and hearers share, and a marker of meta-knowledge about what is generally known. It is also used to indicate a situation in which the speaker knows that the hearer shares some knowledge about a particular piece of information. Consider the following example:

- (17) a. Finally, John and Sarah got married.  
 b. **Y'know** they have been in love for five years.
- (18) a. You study very hard these days.  
 b. Oh ye, **y'know** "no bees no honey; no work no money".

*I mean* functions on the participation framework; it marks the speaker's orientation to two aspects of the meaning of talk: ideas and intentions. It is used by the speaker to mark her upcoming modification of the ideas and intentions of the prior utterance (1987:296). Consider the following examples given by Schiffrin:

- (19) a. But I think um ten years from now,  
 b. it is going to be much more liberal.  
 c. I could see it in my job.  
 d. **I mean**, when I started working for the government, there were no colored people.  
 e. And today eh...uh... twenty five, thirty percent, forty percent of the people I work with are— colored.

This discussion shows that DMs in Schiffrin's proposal do not form a unified grammatical class, but rather functionally related group of items drawn from other classes. They can be particles (*oh, well*), conjunctions (*and, but, or, so, because*), time deictics (*now, then*), lexicalised clauses (*y'know, I mean*) and others (1987: 327). Schiffrin treats DMs as members of a functional class of verbal (and non-verbal)

devices which provide contextual coordinates for ongoing talk. She builds her definition of DMs on a theoretic level: "DMs are sequentially dependent elements which bracket of units of talk". On that basis, Schiffrin (1987: 31-2) argues that, although DMs introduce sentences, they are independent of sentential structure. In other words, the removal of DMs such as *I mean*, *y'know* or *oh* from its initial position will not affect the syntactic structure of the sentences.

It can be concluded that Schiffrin's account of DMs concentrates more on the linguistic and structural role that DMs play in maintaining discourse coherence through linking discourse units. However, she also acknowledges that some DMs such as *oh* and *well* can have pragmatic functions.

## 2.3. Fraser's account of discourse markers

### 2.3.1. The problem of definition

Fraser (1999) points out that the study of DMs has turned into a growth industry in the last ten years. Dozens of articles appear yearly focusing on the nature, meaning and function of DMs. Fraser (1999) investigates the past research and concludes that no clear definition has been given of DMs. He mentions an early reference by Levinson (1983) who considers DMs as a class of linguistic expressions worthy of study in its own rights. He mentions brief comments about DMs, but neither gives a name to this class nor a definition of it:

There are many words and phrases in English, and no doubt most languages, that indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse. Examples are utterance-initial usages of *but*, *therefore*, *in conclusion*, *to the contrary*, *still*, *however*, *anyway*, *well*, *besides*, *actually*, *all in all*, *so*, *after all*, and so on. It is generally conceded that such words have at least a component of meaning that resists truth-conditional treatment... what they seem to do is indicate, often in very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains them is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse.

(Levinson 1983: 87-8)

Like Fraser, Zwicky (1985) has done some research on DMs. But he, too, has not provided a clear definition. He points out that they must be distinguished from other function words; and that they should be prosodically independent; that they have to be separated by punctuation in writing and intonation pause in speech; that they are insulated from the rest of the sentence in which they occur; and that they have pragmatic functions of relating the current utterance to the larger discourse:

Within the great collection of things that have been labelled 'particles', we find at least one grammatical class of items, in English and in languages generally. These have been variously termed 'discourse particles' and 'interjections'; here I will call them 'discourse markers'... on the grounds of distribution prosody, and meaning, discourse markers can be seen to form a class. But like the 'particles' discussed, they are independent words rather than clitics<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An unstressed word typically is a function word that is incapable of standing on its own and attaches in pronunciation to a stressed word, with which it forms a single accentual unit. Examples of clitics are the pronoun 'em in I see 'em and the definite article in French l'arme, "the arm."

(Zwicky 1985: 303)

Fraser (1999) is concerned with the following questions. What are DMs? What are not DMs? What is the grammatical status of DMs? And what do DMs link? The remaining of this subsection answers the first two questions. The next subsection is devoted to answer the other two questions. Fraser (1999) provides a comprehensive definition of DMs:

“A class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs and prepositional phrases. With certain exceptions, they signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce S2, and the prior segment, S1. They have core meaning<sup>2</sup> which is procedural, not conceptual, and their more specific interpretation is ‘negotiated’ by the context, both linguistic and conceptual.

(Fraser (1999:831)

Given this definition, Fraser (1999:942), excludes some of the segment-initial expressions used to be as DMs. Consider the following example:

- (20) a. You should help John in his maths homework.  
b. **Frankly**, I am not very good at maths.

According to Fraser, *frankly* does not relate two discourse segments<sup>3</sup>, but rather signals a comment of separate message that relates to the following segment. Fraser (1996) calls *frankly*, and similar segment-initial expressions such as *obviously* and *stupidly*, “commentary pragmatic markers” rather than DMs. Fraser also excludes particles such as *even*, *only*, *just* and pause markers such as *well* and *ah* form the class of DMs for the same reason. Consider his example below:

- (21) a. The exam was easy. **Even** John passed.  
b. They are fairly restrictive there. **Only** poor Republicans are allowed in.  
c. What am I going to do now? **Well**... I really don't know.  
d. A: Do you know the answer? B: **Ah** ..., I will have to think about it.

### 2.3.2. The grammatical status and function of discourse markers.

Fraser (1999:943) argues that DMs do not form a unified grammatical class. They are rather linguistic expressions gathered from different classes. They have the grammatical status of the main class they belong to. For example, they can be conjunctions (*and* and *but*), adverbs (*anyway* and *however*) and prepositional phrases (*after all* and *in spite of this*). Such DMs differ in grammatical class, but have the same function.

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<sup>2</sup> This core meaning is similar to Blakemore's notion of ‘procedural meaning’ where a linguistic expression encodes a procedure that guides the hearer/reader during the process of the utterance interpretation. This will be discussed in more detail in Blakemore's proposal of procedural meaning.

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘discourse segment’ is used by Fraser to refer to a ‘sentence’, ‘proposition’, ‘utterance’ or ‘message’.

Fraser (1999) also argues that DMs are syntactically subordinate conjunctions. They cannot introduce separate sentences. They require previous independent sentences as can be seen in the following example:

- (22) a.\* **Unless** he finishes his maths homework.  
b. John will not go to cinema **unless** he finishes his maths homework.  
c. A: John will not go to the cinema. B: **Unless** he finishes his maths homework.

Contrary to his earlier writings (1990, 1993) in which he argues that DMs are only those expressions that can introduce separate sentences such as *since*, *because* and *although*, Fraser (1999:943) argues that DMs can include expressions such as *and* and *but* simply because such expressions can relate two separate messages no matter whether they introduce a separate sentence or not:

- (23) a. He plays football **and** I read my favourite novel.  
b. He plays football **but** I read my favourite novel.

As far as the function of DMs is concerned, Fraser (1999) argues that DMs signal a relationship between the interpretations of the segment they introduce (S2) and the prior segment (S1). For instance, the use of *but* in (24a) indicates that there is a contrastive relationship between ‘studying very hard’ and ‘failing the exam’, and the use of *so* in (24b) indicates that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between ‘taking the metro’ and ‘arriving on time’:

- (24) a. Laura studied very hard. **But** she failed her exam.  
b. He took the metro. **So**, he arrived on time.

Fraser maintains that such markers contribute to the coherence of the text by indicating coherence relationships between ‘units of talk’. Thus, *but* in (24a) indicates that the S2 and S1 cohere in relation to *contrast*, and *so* in (24b) indicates that S2 and S1 cohere in relation to *causality*. However, Fraser (1999: 938) indicates that DMs do not have to signal any relationship between S2 and S1 (adjacent segments of talk). A DM can relate the segment it introduces with any other previous segment in discourse. This is known as ‘global coherence’ as contrasted to Schiffrin’s ‘local coherence’. Fraser goes further to argue that a DM does not even have to introduce any discourse segment whatsoever. It can occur in a medial or final position in discourse. Consider Fraser’s example (3) repeated here as (25):

- (25) a. Harry is old enough to drink. **However**, he can’t because he has hepatitis.  
b. It is freezing outside. I will, **in spite of this**, not wear a coat.  
c. We don’t have to go, I will go, **nevertheless**.

Finally, Fraser (1999:948) argues that DMs have a ‘core’ meaning which is procedural<sup>4</sup> not conceptual. It is right that they encode meanings that define the

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<sup>4</sup> Fraser’s notion of procedural is similar to RT’s one in the sense that such expressions do not contribute to the truth-conditional content of utterances in which they occur. However, Fraser argues that such

relationships between discourse segments, but they do not contribute to the truth-conditional content of these segments. Consider the following example:

- (26) a. Claire is a philosopher. **But** her husband is a soldier in the national army.  
b. John can help in installing this software. **After all**, he is a computer engineer.

The highlighted DMs in the above examples can be deleted without affecting the propositional content of the segments. However, if deleted, the hearer will be left with no guidance to the relationship between the two segments. Thus, the ‘core’ meaning encoded by DMs, provides the hearer/reader with the information on how to interpret the message conveyed by S2 vis-à-vis the interpretation of S1 (Fraser 1997:302, 1999:944).

#### 2.4. The difference between Schiffrin’s and Fraser’s accounts.

*Prima facie*, Schiffrin’s (1987) and Fraser’s (1999) proposals seem similar. Both researchers argue for a coherence-based account of DMs. That is, DMs convey coherence relationships between units of talk. Furthermore, both of them claim that DMs do not form a syntactic class but are rather linguistic expressions drawn from different classes. However, there are two main differences between the two proposals. The first is Schiffrin’s (1987) claim that DMs link adjacent units of talk. This is known as a ‘local<sup>5</sup> coherence’, whereas Fraser (1999) argues that a DM need not link two adjacent units of talk. DMs can relate the segment they introduce (S2) to any other previous segment in discourse. This is known as ‘global coherence’. Consider the following example adapted from Fraser (1999: 938):

- (27) He drove the truck through the parking lot and into the street. Then he almost cut me off, he ran a red light. **However**, these weren’t his worst offences. He was driving without a licence.

In this example, *however* does not relate the segment it introduces ‘these weren’t his worst offences’ with just the immediately previous segment ‘after that, he ran a red light’ but rather with all the previous segments including the immediately prior segment. Fraser also argues that a DM can occur in a medial as well as final position in discourse as we have seen in example (25).

The second difference concerns the structural, semantic and pragmatic status of DMs. DMs in Schiffrin’s proposal can be divided into three types: the first includes DMs that have referential meaning such as *and*, *but* and *or* which serve as cohesive devices that contribute to the coherence of discourse. The second type includes DMs which lack (referential) meaning, such as *oh* and *well*. Such markers are independent of the sentential syntactic structure of discourse. They do not have a cohesive role similar

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expressions work as syntactic connecting devices between units of discourse, not as cognitive devices that put constraints on the relevance of discourse.

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘local coherence’ was introduced by Schiffrin (1987) who argues that DMs indicate coherence relations between adjacent units of talk. This term has been later used by Fraser (1997, 1999) as opposed to ‘global coherence’.

to those of the first type, but affect discourse interpretation in the sense that they indicate relationships at the level of ‘information state’, i.e. markers of information management. The third type includes DMs that have referential meaning but are independent of the sentential structure such as *I mean* and *y’know*. Although they have semantic meaning, such markers can be removed from the text structure without affecting the meaning or grammaticality of the text.

Fraser’s (1997, 1999) account concentrates on the pragmatic functions carried by DMs to the extent that he calls them ‘pragmatic markers’ (PMs). DMs in his proposal are all linguistic elements that encode clues which signal the speaker potential communicative intention. Unlike Schiffrin, who concentrates on the structural and linguistic role of DMs in achieving coherence, Fraser concentrates on the cognitive role such markers play in building text coherence. DMs in Fraser’s proposal do not contribute to the truth-conditional (propositional) content of utterances in which they occur. They do not affect the truth or falsity of the utterance if they are removed. However, (Fraser: 1999: 945) argues that DMs have semantic ‘core’ meaning, which is not conceptual but rather procedural. The term procedural here is very similar to that discussed in Wilson and Sperber’s (1993), and Blakemore (1987, 2002). The difference is that Fraser studies DMs within a coherence framework, while Wilson and Sperber and Blakemore study them within a relevance-theoretic framework. Fraser (1997:302) argues that DMs work as procedures that provide the hearer/reader with information on how to relate between the interpretation of S2 and that of S1. This procedural meaning conveyed by DMs contributes to the coherence of the text. For instance, the use of *after all* in (28) guides the hearer/reader to recognize that the message expressed by S2 is *coherent* as premise with respect to the conclusion expressed by S1:

(28) John felt sick. **After all**, he drank three bottles of beer.

Such an example is analysed differently by Blakemore or Wilson and Sperber; they argue that *after all*, in (28) has a procedural meaning that guides the hearer/reader in the inferential phase of the process of utterance interpretation. Thus it instructs the hearer to see that ‘drinking three bottles of beer’ is *relevant* as a ‘premise’ to the ‘conclusion’ ‘feeling sick’ communicated in the first clause. This will be discussed in further detail in Blakemore’s (1987’2002) account of DMs.

### 3. Relevance-based account of discourse markers

Much research has been conducted in studying DMs within a relevance-theoretic framework. Blakemore (1987), to my knowledge, is the first to have developed a relevance-theoretic approach which is considered to be a turning point in the study of DMs. See also Blass (1990) and Wilson and Sperber (1993). This section discusses Blakemore’s (1987, 2002) relevance-theoretic account of DMs and how this account differs from those developed in the coherence framework.

#### 3.1. Discourse markers as semantic constraints on relevance

Blakemore’s (1987) main argument is that DMs play an important role in the process of utterance interpretation by providing the hearers/readers with some guidance in the inferential phase of utterance interpretation and the search for optimal relevance.



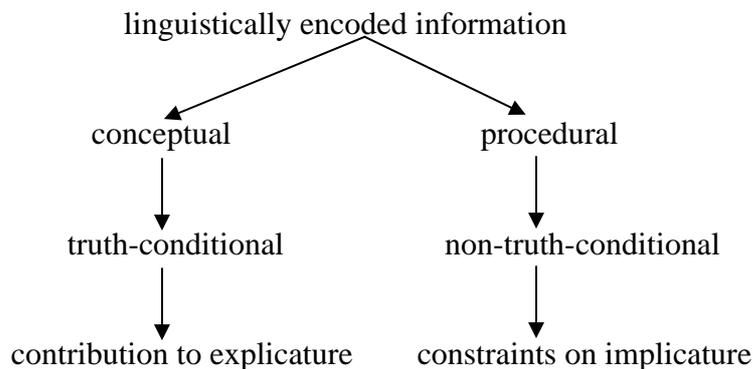
by *so* and *after all* helps the hearer/reader to work out the implicitly communicated message, which is not reached by linguistic decoding alone.

### 3.2. Blakemore's revised account of discourse markers

In the light of the subsequent research by Wilson and Sperber (1993) on the relation between linguistic form and relevance, Blakemore (2002) revises some of her views of DMs and the conceptual-procedural distinction.

In Blakemore (1987), it is argued that linguistically encoded (meaning) can either be conceptual or procedural. She claims that the linguistically encoded conceptual information is the truth-conditional information that plays a role in establishing the explicit level of utterance meaning; linguistically encoded procedural information is the non-truth conditional information that works at the implicit level of utterance interpretation. To put it differently, Blakemore (1987) argues that what is conceptual should always contribute to truth conditions and what is procedural should never contribute to truth conditions.

What is conceptual should only act at the explicit level of utterance interpretation, and what is procedural should only act at the implicit level. Accordingly, all DMs in Blakemore's (1987) account are considered as procedural elements that work at the implicit side of the interpretation of utterances in which they occur. The general picture of the linguistically encoded information in Blakemore's (1987) proposal is given below:



**Figure 3.1: Linguistically encoded information in Blakemore (1987)**

However, Wilson and Sperber (1993: 2) argue that the distinction drawn above is invalid. They propose that the conceptual/procedural distinction is not parallel with the truth-conditional/non-truth-conditional distinction. Their claim is that, on the one hand, there are linguistic expressions which encode conceptual information but do not contribute to the truth-conditional content of the utterance in which they occur as is the case in sentence adverbials. On the other hand, there are linguistic expressions that contribute to the truth-conditional content of their utterance without encoding conceptual information. This is the case with some personal pronouns.

Wilson and Sperber want to argue that these two distinctions cross-cut each other and are isomorphic. To put it differently, some truth conditional constructions encode concepts, some others encode procedures; some non-truth conditional constructions encode concepts, some others encode procedures (1993:2). For example,

illocutionary adverbials such as *seriously* and *frankly* encode conceptual information which does not contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance in which they occur. The removal of such adverbials will not affect the truth or falsity of utterances containing them. In this concern, Wilson and Sperber (1993:19) reach a conclusion that there are four types of linguistic expressions:

A. Linguistic expressions which encode conceptual information that does not contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance in which they occur. These expressions include illocutionary adverbials such as *seriously* and *frankly* and attitudinal adverbials such as *unfortunately*:

- (i) **Seriously**, I am not coming to your birthday party.
- (ii) **Frankly**, I am not coming to your birthday party.
- (iii) **Unfortunately**, I cannot come to your birthday party

B. Linguistic expressions which encode conceptual information that contributes to the truth-conditional content of their utterances such as manner adverbials. Consider the synonymous manner adverbials of *seriously* and *frankly*:

- (i) She told me **seriously** that she is not coming to my birthday party.
- (ii) Clare told John **frankly** that she is not coming to his birthday party.

C. Linguistic expressions which encode procedural information that does not contribute to the truth conditions of utterance containing them. According to Blakemore (1987), such expressions (*so*, *but*, *after all* and *therefore*, etc.) put constraints on the implicit side of the utterance interpretation.

- (i) He did not prepare well for the chemistry exam. **So**, he failed.
- (ii) He did not prepare well for the chemistry exam. **After all**, he failed.

D. Linguistic expressions which contribute to the truth-conditional content of utterances in which they occur and yet they encode procedural information. Examples of these expressions are personal pronouns such as *I* and *he*.

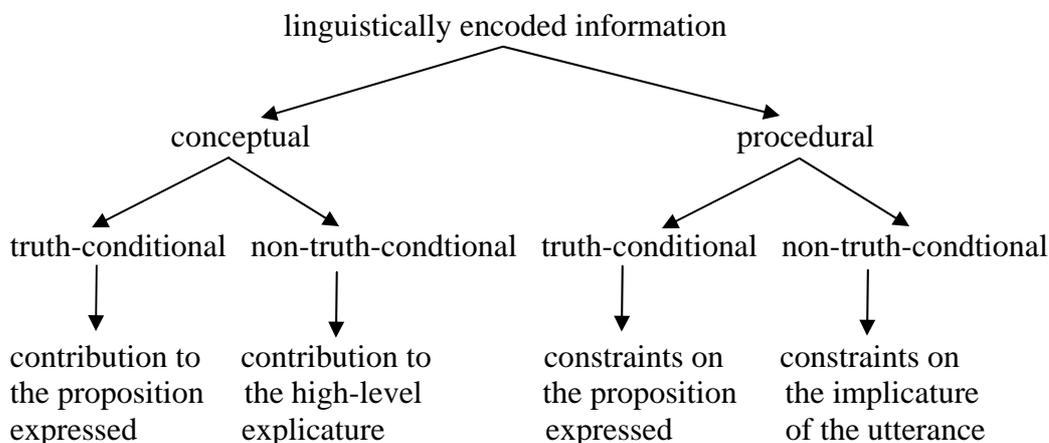
In fact, the fourth type of these linguistic expressions is a big challenge to Blakemore's (1987) account. Wilson and Sperber (1993) argue that pronouns are linguistic expressions that encode procedural information which contributes to the truth-conditional content of the utterance. Furthermore, the procedural information encoded by pronouns puts constraints on explicature rather than implicature in the sense that the use of a pronoun guides the hearer to the intended referent of that pronoun, which is part of the propositional content. Consider the following example:

(31) He is very optimistic.

The information encoded by the pronoun *he* in (31) contributes to the truth-conditional content of the utterance since it affects the truth or falsity of the utterance. Furthermore, the information encoded by the pronoun *he* is procedural in the sense that

it guides the hearer in the process of the utterance interpretation (determining the intended referent of *he*).

The general picture drawn by Wilson and Sperber (1993) on the conceptual/procedural distinction is given below:



**Figure 3.2: Linguistically encoded information in Wilson and Sperber (1993)**

Blakemore revises her account of procedural meaning in the light of the critical analysis of the relation between linguistic form and relevance offered by Wilson and Sperber (1993). In the revised version, *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning*, Blakemore (2002) gives up the idea of parallelism between truth-conditional/conceptual and non-truth-conditional/procedural. She acknowledges that sentence adverbials are linguistic expressions whose conceptual encoding does not contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance in which they are used (2002:43).

Blakemore (2002) acknowledges that the notion of procedural meaning is not as simple as it is presented in her old version (1987). The notion of procedural meaning should be widened to account for some phenomena such as pronouns whose procedural encoding contributes to the truth conditions of the utterances containing them:

However, following Kaplan (1989), Wilson and Sperber (1993) have argued that pronouns do not encode constituents of a conceptual representation, but only procedures for constructing such a representation. In other words, they contribute to truth conditional content only in the sense that they constrain the hearer's search for the representations of their referents. If this is right, it would seem that there are expressions which encode procedures but which contribute to what is traditionally regarded as truth conditional content. In other words, it would seem that it is not the case that all procedural meaning is non-truth conditional.

(Blakemore, 2002: 80).

In her new version, Blakemore (2002) reconsiders her old account of the DM *but* where it has been used to encode two meanings 'contrast' and 'denial of expectation'. The new analysis of *but* proposed by Blakemore goes for a unified account in which *but* has only one procedural meaning, namely, 'contradiction and elimination of an assumption' (2002:103).

No doubt, Blakemore has reconsidered several points in her old account of procedural expressions. However, one point is still not made clear: does the procedural information encoded by some DMs put constraints on the derivation of the cognitive effect or does it encode the cognitive effect itself? In other words, does the procedure encoded by a certain DM guide the line of interpretation or does it encode the elements of this interpretation? It seems that Blakemore (2002) makes no distinction between these two cases. In some places of her book, she argues that the procedural meaning encoded by some DMs puts constraints on the derivation of the cognitive effect; in some other places, the claim is that the procedural meaning encodes the cognitive effect itself:

The analyses just sketched suggest not only that meanings of discourse markers or connectives are linked to cognitive effects, but more particularly, that they directly encode the type of cognitive effect intended. Thus *but* is analysed as encoding the information that the hearer is intended to follow an inferential route which ends in the ‘elimination’ of a contextual assumption, while *after all* is analysed as encoding the information that the intended inferential route is one which results in the ‘strengthening’ of an existing assumption.

(Blakemore, 2002:95)

Contrary to what Blakemore (2002) assumes, I think that the procedural information encoded by some DMs do not encode the cognitive effect. The information plays a role only in constraining the derivation of such cognitive effect. This is done through leading the hearer to certain inferential routes through which he can reach the intended cognitive effect. In other words, the presence of a DM in a certain utterance does not necessitate the presence of the cognitive effect and vice versa. For instance, the cognitive effect established in (30a) is not derived through the procedural meaning encoded by *so*. The assumption that what precedes *so* is a ‘premise’ and what follows it is a ‘conclusion’ is not encoded but derived by following the procedural information encoded by *so*. The same goes for *after all* in (30b).

The evidence for my claim is that the cognitive effect will not necessarily be lost by the removal of *so* or *after all* from the utterances of (30a) and (30b). The hearer will still be able to derive the cognitive effect in (30c) even though neither *so* nor *after all* has been used. In (30c), each clause in the sentence could be either a ‘premise’ or ‘conclusion’ as we have seen. This means that the use of *so* or *after all* only directs the hearer to the intended effect and not encodes the cognitive effect itself.

#### **4. Relevance or coherence?**

As has been discussed earlier, there are two approaches for studying DMs, namely ‘coherence’ and ‘relevance’. Coherence proponents argue that DMs are linguistic elements that contribute to the coherence of discourse by encoding cohesive relationships between discourse units. Relevance theorists argue that DMs encode cognitive (procedural) information which controls the relevance relations between discourse units by constraining the choice of contextual information under which an utterance is relevant. This section highlights the essential difference between these two approaches, discusses the heated dispute between Giora (1997, 1998) and (Wilson 1998)

on the discourse analysis and finally suggests that RT is the ideal and the more appropriate approach for analysing discourse and DMs.

#### 4.1. Wilson views on discourse

##### 4.1.1. Discourse markers and relevance

Relevance theorists such as Sperber and Wilson (1995), Wilson and Sperber (1993), Wilson (1998) and Blakemore (1987, 2002) have reanalysed the past coherence accounts of discourse interpretation and concluded that relevance is the only principle that can account for all aspects of discourse interpretation.

Wilson (1998) and Blakemore (2002:161) argue that the coherence-based analysis of DMs is incomplete and unreliable. Coherence proponents classify DMs into categories that are very broad. For instance, they associate *so*, *therefore* and *hence* with ‘causal’ relations, and *however*, *but*, *yet* and *still* with ‘adversative’ relations. Such a classification ignores the difference in meaning between one DM and another in the same category. Accordingly this classification, *so*, *therefore* and *hence* are treated as having the same meaning.

This classification also implies that there is no one-to-one relationship between the DM and the discourse function. To put it differently, each member of the same category can encode the coherence relationship encoded by the other members since all of them are considered to have the same meaning. For example, the coherence relationship encoded by *however* will be the same as that encoded by *still*, *yet*, and *but*.

Wilson (1998) and Blakemore (2002) argue against the above-mentioned classification. They point out that *however* and *but* do not have the same meaning and thus cannot be used interchangeably. However, Blakemore (2002:161) points out that the difference in meaning is very difficult to capture in an analysis in which these two expressions are associated with a relationship of ‘contrast’ or ‘adversity’. The same goes for *so* and *therefore* which are associated with the ‘consequence’. Consider the following examples:

- (32) He is a prime minister **but**/? **however** not a president.  
(33) a. I am on holiday next week.  
b. **So**/? **Therefore**, you will not attend the meeting.

Wilson (1998) and Blakemore (2002), argue against any coherence-based account of DMs. They claim that such account cannot give an explanation for situations such as (32) and (33) where *however* cannot replace *but* and *therefore* cannot replace *so* even though each pair of these DMs encode the same coherence relation. Such accounts are also unable to give an explanation of the initial use of some DMs. Consider Blakemore’s examples:

- (34) [speaker looks in his wallet and finds a £5 note]  
**So** I did not spend all the money.  
(35) [speaker, who is suffering from shock, has been given a glass of whisky]  
**But**, I don’t like whisky  
(36) **Well**, what would you like to do today?

The problem with the coherence account is that it considers DMs as devices that encode relations between articulated linguistic units of discourse. Relevance theorists maintain that such relations are not necessarily between linguistic units, it could be of cognitive nature—relevance of certain thoughts or propositions to an individual. That is why the coherence account is not able to account for the initial use of the above-mentioned DMs.

These difficulties, Blakemore suggests, can be overcome if DMs are analysed within a relevance-theoretic framework as encoding constraints on the relevance of the utterances in which they occur. DMs should not be looked at as marking connections in discourse, i.e. connecting between propositions expressed by discourse segments. A better understating of DMs, Blakemore suggests, can be achieved if these markers are considered to be contributing to the relevance of the utterance in which they occur by controlling the choice of context under which such utterances are relevant.

## 4.2. Giora's views on discourse

### 4.2.1. Discourse coherence and well-formedness

Giora (1997:17) maintains that relevance should not be looked at as the only principle that controls human communication and that Sperber and Wilson's relevance account cannot replace the past and current accounts of discourse coherence. She argues that discourse coherence is not a derivative notion of relevance and that relevance cannot account for coherence and degrees of coherence as Sperber and Wilson assumes.

Giora maintains that discourse coherence is an independent notion. It has to be looked at as a linguistic and semantic relation that contributes to the well-formedness of discourse. Giora (1985; 1997:22-3) formulates categorical conditions for well-formedness of discourse:

- (37) An informative discourse is well-formed if and only if:
- a. Conforms to the Relevance Requirement in that all its propositions are conceived of as related to a discourse–topic proposition. The discourse topic is a generalisation, preferably made explicit, and placed in the beginning of the discourse. It functions as a reference point to which all incoming propositions are assessed and stored.
  - b. Conforms to Graded Informativeness Condition which requires that each proposition should be more (or at least not less) informative than the one that precedes it in relation to discourse-topic. A message is informative to the extent that it has properties unshared by the previous proposition, which, in turn, allow it to reduce possibilities by half.
  - c. Marks any deviation from Relevance and Graded Informativeness by an explicit marker, e.g. by *the way*, *after all*.

To illustrate how these conditions work, consider the following example given by Giora:

- (38) It has often occurred in the history of science that an important discovery was come upon by chance. A scientist looking into one matter

unexpectedly came upon another which was far more important than the one he was looking into. Penicillin is a result of such a discovery.

The discourse in (38) above is well-formed in Giora's terms. It conforms to the Relevance Requirement. It starts with the general topic and each of the propositions that follow repeat the information mentioned in this discourse topic. This discourse also conforms to the Informativeness Requirements. It starts from the least to the most informative.

Giora argues that Sperber and Wilson's relevance account cannot be a replacement of the discourse coherence account. To support her argument, she gives the following couple of examples:

(39) This first time she was married her husband came from Montana. He was the kind that when he was not alone he would look thoughtful. He was the kind that knew that in Montana there are mountains and mountains have snow on them. He had not lived in Montana. He would leave Montana. He had to marry Ida and he was thoughtful (taken from *Ida* by Gertrude Stein).

(40) This first time she was married her husband came from Montana. He was the kind who loved to be alone and thoughtful. He was the kind who loved mountains, and wanted to live on them. He loved Montana. But he had to Marry Ida and leave Montana.

Giora argues that (39) and (40) are equally relevant in Sperber and Wilson's terms, but there is a huge difference between (39) and (40) in terms of coherence. The reader of these two examples finds that (40) is more coherent (well-formed) than (39). Giora claims that the difference in coherence between (39) and (40) is not accounted for by Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, but rather by discourse coherence. (40) is more coherent (well-formed) because it conforms to the Relevance Requirement; all the propositions in (40) are related to the main discourse-topic 'What Ida's husband had to give up upon marrying her'. It also conforms to the Graded Informativeness Conditions; each proposition in (40) is more informative than the one which precedes it in relation to the main discourse-topic. However, this is not the case with (39).

### **4.3. Is coherence a linguistic or cognitive relation?**

As we have seen in the previous subsection, Giora argues that the well-formedness of discourse depends on discourse coherence which she considers as a linguistic relation. Giora claims that discourse coherence is not of cognitive nature—it is not a derivative notion of relevance. There is no need for any inference or calculation to achieve coherence in discourse. A certain discourse can be coherent no matter whether the propositions and thoughts it contains are relevant to an individual or not.

By contrast, Wilson (1998:57, 65) argues that relevance theory can account for the intuition of discourse coherence. To support this argument, Wilson uses Giora's own examples:

- (41) Bill, who has thalassemia, is getting married to Susan, and 1967 was a great year for French wines.
- (42) Bill, who has thalassemia, is getting married to Susan. Both he and Susan told me that 1967 was a great year for French wines.

Giora (1997) claims that even though (41) and (42) are relevant in Sperber and Wilson's terms, they are not coherent (unacceptable). The sense of incoherence and unacceptability in these two utterances stems from the fact that the two segments in each utterance are unrelated. It seems that a part of the dispute between the coherence and relevance approach of discourse is the notion of 'acceptability'. Giora argues that a certain discourse is acceptable if it is coherent and well-formed, i.e. the units in this discourse are intuitively related and connected. Thus for Giora, notions such as 'coherence', 'acceptability', 'relatedness', 'connectedness' and 'well-formedness' are equivalent. However the notion of 'acceptability' is different in Wilson's terms. Acceptability in RT does not mean well-formedness or linguistic relatedness or connectedness but rather the consistency with the principle of relevance. To put that differently, a certain discourse is acceptable by an individual, if it is relevant to that individual no matter whether the utterances in this discourse are well connected or not.

Wilson (1998:66) argues that RT can account for the sense of acceptability or unacceptability in (39) and (40). In other words, RT can explain why these two utterances are relevant or not. To do so, Wilson provides the following scenarios. The first is when Peter and Mary who are keen at catching up on the news are clearing out the kitchen cupboard. Mary is carrying a newspaper and is about to tell Peter about the marriage of Bill and Susan. Simultaneously, Peter carries a bottle of French wine with a questioning look and Mary utters (39). In such a case each segment of this utterance is relevant to Peter. However, they are intuitively unrelated. The second scenario is when Peter and Mary are catching up on the events of the day and Mary has heard that Bill and Susan will get married on that day and then Mary utters (40). By hearing the utterance Peter has access to the following contextual assumptions:

- (43) a. People with thalassemia drink only red wine.  
 b. When people get married, it is usual to give a present.  
 c. A crate of wine is a suitable wedding present.  
 d. The best present is one that pleases the recipient.

So, through following these deductive rules, Peter will recover the implicature that the 1967 French red wine would be a good wedding present to Bill and Susan. The utterance of (39) is consistent with the principle of relevance, it is also acceptable (coherent) since its segments are intuitively related. This relatedness of the two segments in (39) can be explained in terms of relevance; the interpretation of the first segment makes difference to the relevance of the second segment. That is, we might have got different cognitive effects if the second segment is processed in a different context.

Wilson (1998:68) argues that Relevance Theory can account for the acceptability of discourse more than the Giora's Relevance Requirements. Giora's discourse coherence is achieved through the hierarchical structure of discourse-topics. A well-formed coherent discourse, according to Giora, should have a main discourse-topic

to which all the other sub-topics are related. Both the main discourse-topic and sub-discourse-topics should be explicitly stated, and any deviation in the relevance requirements between the main discourse-topic and the sub-discourse-topics should be indicated by explicit marker.

Wilson points out that it is not the hierarchical relations of discourse topics what makes discourse hang together, but rather the contextual information carried by these discourse-topics as we have seen in (39) and (40). Thus, discourse is comprehensible if the propositions it contains carry contextual information to the hearer or reader no matter whether its discourse-topics are explicit or not. Furthermore, Wilson (1998:71) argues that a deviation in the Relevance Requirement and the Graded Informativeness Conditions need not be indicated by an explicit DM as Giora assumes. Consider the following example:

- (44) a. What did you say?  
b. Mind you head.

According to Giora (1997), (44b) can have two interpretations. The first is locally coherent; (b) is a direct answer to (a)'s questions; (a) and (b), as discourse segments are intuitively related. The second interpretation is non-coherent; (b) is considered as a discourse segment which is not related to (a), and thus (44) is an ill-formed discourse because it deviates from the Relevance Requirements. Wilson (1998:72-73) maintains that the acceptability or unacceptability of any deviation in discourse cannot be accounted for by Giora's discourse coherence. Giora considers an utterance such as (45) as well-formed because the deviation in this utterance is explicitly indicated:

- (45) a. What did you say?  
b. **Oh**, mind you head.

Wilson (1998:73) maintains that not only (44) is ambiguous between two interpretations, but also (45), even though it has got an explicit marker for deviation. So, Wilson asks why (45) is well-formed and (44) is not. An answer to this question could not be offered by the linguistic (semantic) notion of coherence given by Giora. For coherence to be an effective tool in analysing discourse, it has to be reanalysed as cognitive rather than linguistic relation through maintaining that discourse coherence is derived through relevance of discourse to an individual. Thus, the acceptability or unacceptability of (44) and (45) will not be determined by the presence or absence of an explicit linguistic DM but rather by the notion of optimal relevance and the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, two approaches for studying DMs have been investigated. The first approach maintains that DMs are linguistic expressions that relate discourse units. Proponents of this approach analyse DMs as cohesive devices that contribute to the coherence of well-formed discourse by encoding cohesive (semantic) relationships between discourse units. The second approach treats DMs as pragmatic devices that contribute to the interpretation and comprehension of utterance by encoding procedural information that control the choice of contextual information. In other words, such

devices encode relevance relations between propositions (thoughts) and the cognitive environment of an individual.

It seems that there is something in common between the two approaches. The coherence approach has two goals. Firstly, it aims to provide a theory of comprehension of discourse, i.e. how discourse is understood and interpreted. Secondly, it is concerned with providing a theory of evaluation and explanation the intuition of discourse well-formedness. It is obvious that the relevance approach shares the first goal with the coherence approach since RT's main objective is to explain how utterances are understood.

The coherence approach suggests that the best way to account for discourse interpretation is to look at coherence relations between topics in discourse. By contrast, the relevance approach argues that the recognition of coherence relations between discourse topics is neither necessary nor sufficient condition for a successful discourse. What is needed for a comprehensible interpretation of discourse is the recognition of contextual (cognitive) effect held in that discourse. As for the second goal, RT rejects the notion of well-formedness of discourse. RT sees that well-formedness of discourse exists only in relation to a set of well-formedness rules which are independent of individuals, situations and contexts.

It seems that that the whole dispute centres on the notion of 'well-formedness' with respect to 'discourse'. Coherence theorists such as Schiffrin and Giora argue that the well-formedness should be maintained in discourse and it is achieved by linguistic means. A certain discourse is well-formed if and only if its segments are intuitively related. Thus discourse such as (39) and (40) are ill-formed because the segments in each utterance are unrelated.

As for relevance theorists, well-formedness does not exist. The relations in RT are not between articulated linguistic units, but rather between thoughts and propositions. To put that differently, the notion of discourse in RT is cognitive rather than textual. The acceptability of discourse is not determined by linguistic or semantic relationships between units in discourse but rather by the consistency with the principle of relevance discourse has. Given that, discourses such as (39) and (40) would be acceptable in some circumstances as. It seems that Wilson's account is more convincing and reliable than Giora's one. After all, everything will be cognitively integrated in the interpretation and comprehension of discourse.

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