Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics 5

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Discourse markers
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Discourse markers

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Intonation and transcription conventions

The role of intonation in my analysis

Although my analysis of discourse markers is primarily an analysis of how particular expressions are used to organize/conversational interaction, the impact that a single expression has in conversation may differ depending upon the way in which it is said. For example, oh with a rising intonation might be interpreted as a request for confirmation, as in:

A: I think the party's called for six o'clock.
B: Oh?

But the same expression with a falling intonation might be interpreted not as a request for confirmation, but as an acknowledgement:

A: I think the party's called for six o'clock.
B: Oh.

Because the role of intonation is important, I have paid attention to it in my transcription conventions (see below). I have also discussed intonation when it makes a systematic contribution to the interpretation of an expression. But intonation has not received nearly as much attention as two other factors in my analysis: the expression being used as a marker (its linguistic properties) and the conversational (textual, interactional, etc.) context of the expression. It is my hope that an understanding of these two factors will act as a foundation for a more thorough analysis of the prosody of discourse markers.

Key to transcription conventions

falling intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at end of declarative sentence)

? rising intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at end of interrogative sentence)
Discourse markers

. continuing intonation: may be slight rise or fall in contour (less than '. ' or ' ? '); may be followed by a pause (shorter than '. ' or ' ? ')
!

! animated tone

... noticeable pause or break in rhythm without falling intonation

(each half-second pause is marked as measured by stop watch)

-

self interruption with glottal stop

:

lengthened syllable

italics emphatic stress

CAPS very emphatic stress

Bold is used in the examples to highlight those discourse markers being discussed in the text

type

When speech from A and B overlap, the starting point of the overlap is marked by a left-hand bracket, and the ending point of the overlap is marked by a right-hand bracket.

A: Do you know what time the party’s supposed to start? Six o’clock.
B: Six o’clock.

When lack of space prevents continuous speech from A from being presented on a single line of text, then ‘=’ at end of A1 and ‘=’ at beginning of A2 shows the continuity.

A1: Do you know what time the party’s supposed to start?
B: Six o’clock.
A2: =Because I have to work late tonight.

When speech from B follows speech from A without perceptible pause, then Z links the end of A with the beginning of B.

A: Do you know the time? Six o’clock.
B: Six o’clock.

When speech from B occurs during what can be heard as a brief silence from A, then B’s speech is under A’s silence.

A: I can’t wait to go to the party! It’ll be fun.
B: Oh yeah!