

## Discourse Markers in Children's Narratives: the Cases of *And* and *So*

Discourse markers, which guide the hearer to the inferential procedure that yields the intended interpretation, consist of a functionally related group of expressions marking relations between units of discourse. Discourse markers play many different roles in discourse: 'they express the speaker's attitude towards the addressee or towards the situation spoken about, his assumptions, his intentions, his emotions' (Wierzbicka 1991: 341). In discourse like narratives, they also signal relations between the utterances and between larger discourse units. Such expressions are not only widespread across language, but are also among the most frequently used items in discourse. Taking this into account, it is not surprising that discourse markers are seen as central to pragmatic accounts.

According to the coherence-based approach (Schiffrin 1987; Redeker 1990), coherence arises as discourse markers draw the hearer's attention to the relation between the discourse unit it introduces and the preceding context. Thus, coherence is one of the primary functions that discourse markers have. In contrast, according to Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995; Blakemore 2002), the coherent interpretation between the utterance containing a discourse marker and the preceding one is simply a by-product of the search for optimal relevance. The degree of relevance of an utterance is affected by the amount of processing effort required for the derivation of cognitive effects. Taking this into account, the use of discourse markers is consistent with the speaker's aim of minimising the processing cost.

Given the general agreement on the features of discourse markers and the fundamental differences among different frameworks, asking a developmental question which appears to have been largely neglected in the extensive literature on the topic will shed light on the phenomenon of discourse markers. The aim of the present study is to examine how children between 4 and 12 years of age acquire competence in the use of discourse markers, *and* and *so*. This study will demonstrate that *and* and *so* have multiple functions that either contribute to textuality or express the speaker's perception of the communicative situation, and that there is variation in the use of these markers in children's narratives across ages. The present study will adopt a functional approach which is based on the descriptive and distributional analyses of uses.

Children from an early age of 4 years seem to have top-down control of their narratives, since *and* and *so* function at both local and global levels. *And* undergoes a significant increase in frequency until 7 years of age, and functions to guide the hearer to the inferential procedure that yields the intended interpretation as a signal of continuity, as a signal of a change of context such as a new topic, and as a floor holder. At around 7 years, children show further development, demonstrating a considerable increase in the frequency of occurrences of *so*. However, the developmental progression takes the form of not only increasing use of *so*, it also changes in the main functions served by it. There is a remarkable increase in the use of *so* marking a segment boundary, given that children between 7 and 9 years increasingly use *so* to serve a sole boundary marking function and to serve multiple functions, indication of consequential relation and segment boundary at the same time.

## References

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