Research Review on Discourse Markers

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ABSTRACT

As an important component of the speech system, the status of discourse markers in language research can't be ignored. Due to different research perspectives, scholars from various countries have not yet reached a unified consensus on the definition, characteristic, function, and classification of discourse markers. At present, there are three main theoretical frameworks for studying discourse markers: coherence theory, relevance theory and adaptation theory. The research on discourse markers in China didn't flourish until the 21st century. There is still a lot of room for further research in this field. For example, the localization of research theory, the multi-dimensional research perspective, and the interdisciplinary research content are gradually attracting the attention of scholars.

Keywords: Discourse markers, Review, Enlightenment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers (often abbreviated as DMs) are a kind of explicit oriented markers in the process of discourse communication, which play a vital role in the generation and understanding of discourse. Discourse markers, as an important type of language expression in the speech system, didn't attract the attention of foreign scholars until the middle and late 1970s. It gradually became a hot spot in the field of synchronic linguistic circle in the 1980s. Discourse markers have become a new research topic in foreign conversation analysis and pragmatic research in recent years. The role of discourse markers in discourse is mainly pragmatic and dynamic. [20]

2. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ON DISCOURSE MARKERS ABROAD

Foreign research on discourse markers in language communication mainly focuses on English. Due to different research perspectives, scholars have not yet reached a unified consensus on the definition, characteristic, function, and classification of discourse markers. There are three main theoretical frameworks for studying discourse markers: coherence theory, relevance theory and

adaptation theory.

2.1 Research Situation of Discourse Markers Abroad

Foreign researches on discourse markers in language communication mainly focus on English, and most of the researchers are located in European and American countries. Relatively speaking, English is far ahead of other languages in the field of research. Taking the America (plus Canada) as an example, scholars in this country are currently doing more research on the grammaticalization of discourse markers (diachronic research). There are also a small amount of related research in German, French, Spanish, Japanese, Korean and other fields. In recent years, some Taiwanese or overseas ethnic Chinese scholars have also published their research results on Chinese discourse markers in foreign academic journals, but the research on English discourse markers still dominates. Schiffrin's "Discourse Markers"[8] conducted a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the discourse functions of 11 discourse markers. After entering the 1990s, scholars represented by Redeker [6], Blakemore [1], Fraser [2], Lenk [4], Jucker & Ziv [3] etc. pushed the research of discourse markers to a new stage. All of these studies started from the syntactic or semantic features of discourse markers and focused on the analysis of pragmatic functions.

Foreign discourse marker research methods have experienced a trend from synchronic research to diachronic research to the combination of synchronic and diachronic research. The research corpus covers many fields such as spoken language, written language, and interview record. In recent years, the research on discourse markers abroad has developed towards written language. Some scholars have found that the discourse markers in written language have some different characteristics from those in spoken language. The results of foreign English discourse marker research have important implications for the research of Chinese scholars.

2.2 Three Theoretical Frameworks

At present, the research on discourse markers is mainly divided into two camps: One is the "coherent faction" represented by Schiffrin, Redeker, Fraser, Lenk, etc.; the other is the "related faction" represented by Blakemore, Rouchota, Jucker, etc. It is worth noting that the adaptation theory proposed by Vershueren [9] is gradually becoming a new perspective for the study of discourse markers.

2.2.1 Coherence Theory

Coherence theory believes that the most important feature of a text is coherence, and discourse markers are an important cohesive mechanism in a text. Levinson [5] mentioned that "in most languages, there are many words or phrases that mark a certain relationship between a certain discourse and the previous discourse. For example, when it comes to words like but, therefore... at the beginning of a sentence, their function is to show that the sentence they are in is a response or continuation of a certain part of the previous discourse". Schiffrin [8] believes that discourse markers play an important role in discourse coherence, and proposes five levels of discourse coherence models: exchangeable structure, behavioral structure, conceptual structure, participation frame and information state. Discourse markers mix different levels into a coherent whole by operating on multiple levels. However, the above five levels have been widely criticized due to their limited validity and explanatory power. [11] Redeker proposed a model with only three levels on the basis of evaluating Schiffrin's model, namely conceptual structure, rhetorical structure and continuous structure. [6] She believes that Schiffrin's information state and participation frame levels are not independent of other levels, and her model can't fully describe the functional level of discourse markers.

Fraser proposed that discourse markers add a certain connection relationship between a certain aspect of their discourse component (ie Segment 2) and the previous discourse component (Segment 1), namely, the S1+DM+S2 model. [2] What Fraser and Schiffrin have in common is that they only involve a single sentence or a pair of adjacent words, and they haven't examined the role of discourse markers in a larger scale or analyzed their relationship to discourse coherence as a whole, which are shortcomings.

Unlike Fraser and Schiffrin, Lenk pointed out that in a text, discourse markers can not only play a coherent role locally, but more importantly, they can also play a coherent role as a whole, namely, they indicate a certain relationship between the discourse and the previous or following text.

2.2.2 Relevance Theory

Sperber and Wilson combined cognition and communication, and proposed the relevance theory in 1986. They believe that language communication is a process of mutual manifestness of explicit expression — reasoning. Human cognition has a general goal, which is to try to obtain the greatest cognitive effect with the smallest investment in the cognitive process. In order to achieve this goal, people must focus on the most relevant information. The use of discourse markers is an important language mechanism to achieve this goal. Blakemore studied the influence of discourse markers on discourse relevance from the perspective of relevance theory. She pointed out that the only function of discourse markers is to help the listener understand the speaker's words by concretizing certain characteristics of the context and the effects achieved. [1] Discourse markers are essentially a kind of pragmatic markers, which play an explicit guiding role in discourse comprehension. Rouchota used the framework of relevance theory to raise the following questions: What do discourse markers connect? Do they, as the coherence theory says, connect the previous and following discourse units, namely, adjacent sentences? [7] Or do they connect, as relevance theory suggests, the relationship between discourse and context? His research results show that in addition to connecting adjacent sentences, discourse markers can also directly connect discourse and context, restricting the listener's reasoning process. Although coherence theory and

relevance theory both hold that discourse markers play a restrictive role, coherence theory believes that discourse markers restrict the relation propositions that the listener needs to recognize and express coherent relations when they understand the discourse. However, relevance theory believes that discourse markers lead the listener to the context and context effects expected by the speaker, thereby restricting the listener's discourse understanding process.

2.2.3 Adaptation Theory

The adaptation theory proposed by Jef Verschueren provides a new view for the study of discourse markers from the perspectives of cognition, society and culture. [9] Adaptation theory emphasizes the importance of speakers making language choices in accordance with various relations. The reason why the language user can make various appropriate choices in the process of using the language is that language has "variability", "negotiability" and "adaptability". Discourse markers are the result of language selection under the guidance and control of the speaker's metapragmatic awareness, and have special metapragmatic functions. The core of adaptation theory is dynamic adaptation, which refers to the dynamic nature of mutual adaptation between contextual relations and various language structures in the process of language use.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ON DISCOURSE MARKERS IN CHINA

Chinese scholars paid relatively late attention to discourse markers. In the 21st century, the research of discourse markers begins to flourish. According to the CIKI core article search, there were only two papers focusing on discourse markers in the 1990s, but this number greatly increased since 2000, reaching thousands of papers. This shows that the Chinese linguistic circle pays more and more attention to the research of discourse markers. The theoretical models adopted by most scholars are relevance theory and adaptation theory.

At present, Chinese research on discourse markers has been greatly developed, and the number of papers has greatly increased. From a research perspective, there are the most papers examining the language functions of individual discourse markers. These researchers try to describe in detail the meaning and function of single or

certain types of discourse markers in different languages, such as Gu Jincheng's research on the word "well". [10] The number of papers on the four aspects of basic research, pragmatic function (macroscopic view) research, discourse analysis and conversation analysis on discourse markers is roughly the same. Among them, there are many papers in this field that study how discourse markers help elicit topics, realize turn-taking, and change topics, as well as how discourse markers ease sentences from the perspective of conversation analysis. This is a hot spot second only to the study of the pragmatic functions of discourse markers (microscopic view). The number of papers on the acquisition of discourse markers through corpus is limited. The most representative ones include: Liu Liyan studied the acquisition and misuse of discourse markers in cross-cultural communication [14], and Xu Jie used the comparative analysis method of Chinese English Learner's Spoken Corpus (SECCL) and the Native English Speaker's Spoken Corpus (SBCSAE) to conduct an empirical study on the acquisition of the discourse marker "you know" by Chinese English learners. [18] The number of papers on the translation research of discourse markers is also limited. For example, Wang Rui discussed discourse markers and their translation in Shakespeare's plays [15], Wu Guoliang studied the usage and translation review of the discourse marker "well" [16], and Xie Nan studied the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in audiovisual texts and the lack of information in Chinese translation. Some scholars have made attempts in the construction of discourse marker corpus [17], such as Kan Minggang [13]. Xu Jing [19] and Hu Guili [12] focus on discourse markers in institutional discourse. At present, there are not many researches on discourse markers in business English negotiation. The Chinese research on discourse markers currently mainly adopts the synchronic research method, but some scholars have conducted diachronic studies on the evolution and development of discourse markers. Fewer scholars have adopted both synchronic and diachronic methods at the same time. This aspect deserves more attention from scholars.

4. ENLIGHTENMENT AND SUGGESTION

Chinese research on discourse markers has made considerable progress, but there is still a lot of room for development, which is mainly reflected in the following aspects:

4.1 Localization

The development of foreign discourse marker theory is relatively mature, mainly including coherence theory, relevance theory and adaptation theory. Most of the researches in the field of discourse marker in China are based on the introduction of these three foreign theories, failing to form a set of their own and perfect theoretical system. Research scholars on discourse markers are still in a scattered state and have not formed a strong team. This makes the study of discourse markers in China unable to develop in depth. Chinese is a precious cultural resource in China. Although there are many commonalities between Chinese and English, there are also many differences. The types, features and functions of discourse markers in Chinese and English are not completely equal. Localizing the theory of foreign discourse markers to guide the research of Chinese discourse markers has important theoretical and practical significance. At the same time, the development and construction of the localization theory with Chinese or English-Chinese contrast as the research object will also contribute to the research field of human discourse markers.

4.2 Multiple Dimensions

Research on the pragmatic functions of Chinese discourse markers (microscopic view) accounts for nearly half of all papers, research on the perspective of conversation analysis accounts for about one-fifth, and the total number of papers researched from other perspectives is small and its distribution is uneven. Therefore, the research perspective of discourse markers can be expanded to multiple dimensions in the future, such as discourse marker language acquisition research, discourse marker translation research, discourse marker corpus construction, institutional discourse marker research, cross-language comparative study of discourse markers, comparative research of discourse markers in written and spoken language, etc.

4.3 Multiple Subjects

Although scholars from various countries have not formed a unified understanding and scientific basis for the definition and function of discourse markers, the research on discourse markers should not be limited to theoretical basic research or pure language research. Language, as the carrier and tool of human communication, has clear tasks and

purposes in each specific context. Researches on the functions of discourse markers in disciplines such as law, business, medicine, finance and politics can not only enrich the research results of discourse markers, but also promote the development of these disciplines.

5. CONCLUSION

As an important component in speech communication, discourse markers have gradually attracted more and more scholars' attention. Judging from the current research results, this field is in a stage of vigorous development. Research theories are constantly enriched. Although scholars from various countries have not reached a consensus on some basis of discourse markers, there have been heated discussions from the contention of a hundred schools of thought. Research languages have gradually increased, covering different languages such as English, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, and Korean; at the same time, dialects of different languages have also begun to enter the field of vision of researchers. There are both synchronic methods and diachronic methods, or the combination of synchronic and diachronic methods. And research perspectives expand to multiple dimensions and subjects.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Xiujin Qian.

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