Multifunctionality in lexical and gestural discourse markers

Dr. Schuyler Laparle, Department of Communication & Cognition, Tilburg University

s.m.laparle@tilburguniversity.edu

As we move from one utterance to the next, we use different communicative strategies to signal how our utterances are related to one another and how each utterance is meant to contribute to the goals of the interaction. The most well-studied of these strategies is the use of lexical discourse markers (LDMs), words or phrases that provide instructions as to how the speaker's contribution should be interpreted and received. Their meaning is thus primarily *procedural* rather than *conceptual* in that they tell the comprehender what to *do* with incoming truth-conditional information (e.g. Fraser 1999).

In face-to-face interaction, this procedural meaning is often embodied, as interlocutors use their hands to introduce, refer to, and remove discourse topics, as if they were physical objects (e.g. Bressem & Wegener 2021; Streeck 2009). Like LDMs, these *gestural* discourse markers (GDMs) are highly multifunctional and polysemous. For example, a `holding away' gesture, in which an outstretched open hand is held as if to hold an object away from the gesturer's body, can be used to reject a topic, evaluate a topic as unwanted, refuse an action, or a combination thereof (Bressem & Müller 2014; Bressem & Wegener 2021). In another context, the same gesture may be used referentially to depict a literal holding away action described in the truth-conditional content of accompanying speech (Ladewig 2014).

In this talk, I explore the ways in which the multifunctionality of LDMs and GDMs reflect the same underlying cognitive processes, namely metaphor and metonymy, which have long been identified as the driving forces of polysemy in LDMs (Fischer 2000). I focus on two English LDMs, *however* and *anyway*, and the GDMs that accompany them. As demonstrated in (1)-(3), both LDMs maintain truth-conditional, evaluative, and discourse structural senses. Also demonstrated is a sample of the variation in co-occurring GDMs, with brackets indicating the alignment of the gesture named at the brackets' right edge. The GDMs discussed fall into three general classes: (i) 'away' gestures in which metaphoric discursive objects are held or moved away from the body; (ii) pointing-up gestures in which the index finger is straightened as if to indicate the numeral '1', and (iii) 'presentation' gestures in which a metaphoric discursive object is presented for mutual inspection. These three classes of GDMs have been identified as *recurrent* gestures, meaning that they demonstrate stable form-meaning mappings across speakers and interactions (Ladewig 2014; Müller 2017). Given the extensive descriptive work on both the LDMs and GDMs under discussion, we are well-positioned to consider the polysemy of each marker, and how individual senses relate within and across semiotic modes.

All data comes from American television talk shows collected through the UCLA Television News Archive. I take a microanalytic approach in order to fully appreciate the linguistic, social, and discursive factors that contribute to the articulation and interpretation of both the LDMs and GDMs in context (Streeck 2008). Through these microanalyses, I aim to show the ways in which the metonymic connections that hold between GDM senses can provide new insights into the embodied motivation of multifunctionality and polysemy in the lexicon.

1) **Truth-conditional**
   a. First of all, you don't need quid pro quo. **[It's super illegal <u>anyway</u>]**_{SWEEP AWAY}.
      [UID: 135ad8d4-f496-11e9-9c8d-089e01ba0770,759]
   b. **[<u>However</u> the Mueller investigation turns out,]**_{PRESENT} this has been a bittersweet ending.
      [UID: 14480e4e-0f2a-11e9-bafc-089e01ba0335,659]

2) **Evaluative**
   a. When I worked at Best Buy, my boss left because I was Airbnbing his office on weekends. **[And who are these people anyway]**_{FLICK AWAY}
      [UID: 098090d4-1d5d-11ea-8bbd-089e01ba0770,1119]
   b. And that gives me hope that- when the circus gets done in the oval office, **[whatever- <u>however</u> that falls out]**_{PUSH AWAY}, and it will fall out.
      [UID: 3a6e0694-1dec-11e8-9380-089e01ba0335,2172]

3) **Discourse structural**
   a. The idea is, don't cut it down, just make it four hours of really exciting play-plays. **[Anyway, I'll stop talking Shakespeare]**_{PUSH AWAY}
      [UID: f00485b2-051e-11ea-8f95-089e01ba0770,3559]
   b. Their first mistake: putting their request on paper. **[<u>However</u>, the white house staff came up with a solution]**_{POINT UP}.
      [UID: 8b3f2920-801d-11e8-8aa3-089e01ba0335,1243]

References

Bressem, J. & Müller, C. (2014). A repertoire of recurrent gestures of German. In C. Müller, A. Cienki, E. Fricke, S. H. Ladewig, D. McNeill, & J. Bressem (Eds.), *Body – language communication. An international handbook on multimodality in human interaction* (Vol. 2, pp. 1575–1591). Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

Bressem, J. & Wegener, C. (2021). Handling talk: A cross-linguistic perspective on discursive functions of gestures in German and Savosavo. *Gesture*, 20(2), 219–253.

Fischer, K. (2000). *From cognitive semantics to lexical pragmatics: The functional polysemy of discourse particles.* Walter de Gruyter.

Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers?. *Journal of pragmatics*, 31(7), 931–952.

Ladewig, S. (2014). Recurrent gestures. In M ̈uller, C., Cienki, A., Fricke, E., Ladewig, S., McNeill, D., and Tessendorf, S., editors, *Body–language–communication: An international handbook on multimodality in human interaction* (Vol. 2, pp. 1558–1575). Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

Müller, C. (2017). How recurrent gestures mean: Conventionalized contexts-of-use and embodied motivation. *Gesture*, 16(2):277–304.

Streeck, J. (2008). Metaphor and gesture: A view from the microanalysis of interaction. In *Metaphor and gesture* (pp. 259-264). John Benjamins.

Streeck, J. (2009). *Gesturecraft: The manu-facture of meaning*. John Benjamins Publishing.