

THE FUNCTION OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN ARABIC NEWSPAPER OPINION ARTICLES

ABSTRACT

The present study examines the function of discourse markers in Arabic newspaper opinion articles. In this study, discourse markers are not only connecting- words that contribute to the cohesion of text, but they are also crucial tools for achieving communicative act in the text. These expressions that come from different grammatical classes and mostly occur sentence-initially function across sentence boundaries to connect textual units above the sentence and to guide and influence the text-receivers' interpretation throughout the text. Because of the crucial communicative role of discourse markers, they are important elements in text production and perception.

The main goal of this study is to identify discourse markers that are used in Arabic newspaper opinion articles and describe their function at two levels of text structure, i.e. the sentence and the paragraph. To this effect, the study analyzes 50 texts that form the data in the study, taking a semantic/pragmatic relation-based approach. The analytical model employed in this study consists of three steps. The first step is segmenting the texts into paragraphs and sentences. The second step is describing the functional relations that connect units of texts at each level. Two descriptive tools are employed: the Rhetorical Structure Theory to describe relations between sentences and the Text-type Theory to describe the relations that connect paragraphs. The final step in the analytical model is identifying the discourse markers at the units' boundaries. Halliday's (2005) thematic structure analysis is an important tool that the study uses to facilitate this identification.

By means of this three-step analytical model discourse markers are identified in the data and the environment in which they occur is described. Based on the description of the discourse markers' environment as well as the contribution of these items to their environment, the present study suggests functional classifications for discourse markers at the sentence and the paragraph levels. At sentence boundaries, discourse markers are classified as follows: additive, contrastive, explanatory, inferential, sequential, alternative, exceptive, background, subjective, and interactive discourse makers. At paragraph boundaries, discourse markers are found to serve three main functions: continuity, refocus, and change of topic.