

# Explorations in Linguistics

*An Online Journal of Undergraduate Research*

**Volume 1 Issue 2**

**July 2014**

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Linguistics

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# Explorations in Linguistics

*Explorations in Linguistics: An Online Journal of Undergraduate Research* is published twice a year by the Linguistics Program at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S. Its goal is to promote undergraduate student research in all areas of linguistics. The journal is directly overseen by an undergraduate student editor and reviewers with input from linguistics faculty.

## **SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

Submissions are welcomed from undergraduate student authors currently specializing in any discipline (authors are not required to be linguistics majors or minors). In addition, students who have graduated from an undergraduate institution within the last 12 months and/or who have not completed more than two semesters of graduate school are also invited to submit their work for review. Papers co-authored by faculty/student teams are not permitted though it is understood that a submission that originated as a class project will have benefitted from faculty input; nevertheless, faculty cannot serve as co-authors. Please see the [Guidelines for Authors](#) website for more information.

Each submission is peer-reviewed by at least three members of the Editorial Review Board: typically two undergraduate students and a faculty member. Other than the Student Editor, peer reviewers will follow a double-blind review process; that is, the identity of the author(s) will not be disclosed to the reviewers and the identity of the reviewers will not be disclosed to the author(s). Following the review process that usually takes between 2-3 months, the author(s) will receive one of three publication decisions regarding the submission: (1) accepted with minor revisions in language and/or content, (2) request to resubmit with major revisions in language and/or content, or (3) rejected.

**Specific questions should be sent to the Editor:**

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**An Examination of Adults' and Children's Containment and Support  
Relation Expression Patterns**

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Elisabeth Tawa, Swarthmore College

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This article has been withdrawn at the author's request.

## Ambiguity of Words on the Road

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Andrea Groch, Saint Joseph's University

*Andrea Groch* is currently a senior at Saint Joseph's University where she studies Communications and Marketing. She likes to paint, golf, and play piano in her free time. She hopes to do work in public relations, social media, writing, or relationship management and she would like to visit Paris someday.

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Knowing that I take a Linguistics course, my Brazilian friend asked me questions relating to American driving terminology that confused her. Specifically, she inquired about the terms *parkway* and *driveway*. She asked, "Why do we park in the driveway and drive on the parkway?" Since I was unsure of an answer, I looked online for an explanation.

The terms *parkway* and *driveway* cause confusion for non-native and even native English speakers. This confusion occurs because the word "park" has a double meaning. Additionally, the origin of the word "driveway" is typically overlooked. The word "parkway" originated as a place where children or young adults would play and have fun (*The Professional Driver*, n.d.). A parkway was not a road with many cars. Back in the 1800's, people would stop leisurely for breaks, ride in their carriages, or take strolls in parks. At the time, it made sense to call this place a parkway. Over the years, many people have acquired access to cars and nowadays, most people consider parkways to be high speed roads with cars. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many people did not have the resources to own much land. Therefore, they did not own driveways or a strip of land leading directly to their homes. Over time, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, many people acquired enough money to afford land that led from a public road leading directly to their dwellings. A driveway was never about parking a car (since there were no cars), but instead involved being able to reach home. This provides a perfect example of how language changes overtime and how English can be confusing for non-native speakers to learn.

Furthermore, homonyms, words that are spelled the same but have different meanings, are also difficult for non-native speakers to remember or understand. In this case, "parkway" as a place for children to play, and "parkway" as a road with many cars, are both spelled and pronounced the same, but possess different meanings. Therefore, they represent an example of homonyms in the English language. It is extremely difficult to memorize homonyms in a language, especially English.

My friend also talked about some confusing signs on the road, for example "Bobcat Xing." She asked, "What does 'Xing' mean?" When I Googled this word online, many possibilities of the meaning of the word come up, including an abbreviation for a road crossing, a Chinese surname, a social network platform, or a Korean boy band. One could conclude that the first definition would make the most sense for the sign, but it may be too late when we are on the road to know immediately what the word means. This type of sign could be especially confusing and even dangerous for those who are non-native speakers driving on the road who were never formally taught words like "Xing." My friend asked, "Would it be so hard to simply say 'Watch for bobcats'?" It is

important for road authorities to know where words come from and to know how commonly they are used to make roads safe and road signage clear. This is why it would benefit people of all educational backgrounds and ages to become familiar with linguistics.

### References

"Why Do We Drive on a Parkway and Park on a Driveway?" *The Professional Driver*.  
N.p., n.d. Web. 23 May 2014.  
<<http://theprofessionaldriver.com/2012/08/23/why-do-we-drive-on-a-parkway-and-park-on-a-driveway/>>.

## Discourse Markers as Discrete Speech Acts

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Drew Nevitt, Macalester College

*Drew Nevitt* is currently a senior at Macalester College where he studies Linguistics and Philosophy. With his spare time, he enjoys reading novels and short stories, playing acoustic guitar and cooking. After graduation, he plans to teach English in Germany and eventually pursue graduate work in Philosophy.

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Identify the two discourse markers in the following sentence: “That exam was like, you know, really hard.” Even if you’re not sure what discourse markers are, you probably had no trouble picking them out: ‘like’ and ‘you know’. These two items indicate the casualty of the conversation. Discourse markers are words or phrases that do not add meaning to a sentence but instead play a role in the social context of the conversation (Schiffrin, 1987). Prime examples include ‘like’, ‘ya know’ and ‘um’. While I agree that these markers indicate social context rather than add meaning to a given sentence, I think many of these markers are more than just words or phrases within the sentence. In this essay I propose two categories of discourse markers, fillers and non-fillers, and suggest that they are best considered discrete and separate speech acts, functioning outside the main sentence.

We will consider a speech act to be an utterance intended to produce some sort of reaction in the hearer (Searle, 1971). Examples are provided from three different types of speech acts: stating, requesting and maintaining social connection.

Filler discourse markers signal the speaker’s intention to continue speaking once they think of their next word or words. They act as placeholders, indicating the continued linguistic engagement of the speaker even while they’re not producing words. That is, they state to the hearer that the speaker isn’t finished speaking. For example “That line is in chapter, um, five.” This marker indicates that the conversation has not ended.

Non-filler discourse markers help maintain the social connection between speaker and hearer, sometimes by requesting confirmation that the hearer is still engaged. For instance, the use of ‘ya know’ in the following sentences: “I’ve never had a professor who was so, ya know, boring” and “I just wanted to, ya know, cry”. Re-reading these sentences without ‘ya know’ interprets as a straightforward assertions rather than components of a social interaction. The fact that deleting the discourse marker noticeably changes the sentences shows it does more than hold the speaker’s place. As such, inference to the best explanation leads us to conclude that ‘ya know’ reinforces the linguistic bond between the interlocutors.

Both fillers and non-fillers qualify as separate speech acts because they serve different functions than the main sentence. When a filler is inserted, the speaker has departed from whatever intention is carried by the main sentence and now has a new intention – that of place-holding, or stating the intent to continue speaking. Similarly, non-fillers are not intended to work towards the ends of the main sentence but rather to perform the separate function of maintaining social connection. Since we have defined a



speech act as a “manifestation of an intention,” these discourse markers are separate speech acts by definition.

Further evidence for this is the ability of many discourse markers to occur almost anywhere in a sentence, regardless of syntactic constraints. Indeed, discourse analysis expert and Georgetown University linguistics professor Deborah Schiffrin notes that they tend to “occur quite freely within a sentence at locations which are very difficult to define syntactically...[and which are] just not evident” (1987, p. 32). The best explanation is that they are their own speech acts because they serve separate functions than that of the main sentence. They aren’t bound by the syntactic rules of the sentence because they are merely *located* within it and are not *part of* it. Any explanation that counts discourse markers as belonging to the main sentence must find a way within the framework of English syntax to accommodate their immense distribution, which, as Schiffrin notes, does not seem possible.

Essentially, these markers act as asides that are embedded in the main sentence but not strictly assigned to parts of it. Viewing them as separate speech acts may advance our knowledge of pragmatics and allow us to more accurately describe an important aspect of English. In addition, it may help put an end to the unfounded criticism that is so often leveled at those, particularly young people, who employ these speech acts in everyday conversation.

### References

Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. (1971). *The philosophy of language*. London: Oxford University Press.

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