

The Use of the Discourse Marker *say* in Conversational English

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Lee, Chun-*hee*. 2003. The Use of the Discourse Marker *say* in Conversational English. *SNU Working Papers in English Language and Linguistics* 2, 133-156. This paper analyzes syntactic and pragmatic features of the discourse marker *say* using a large corpus of naturally occurring data. In so doing, it attempts to explain how a particular discourse marker gets its different interpretations. First, the examples of *say* are divided into two groups in terms of their syntactic positions (i.e., the clause-internal position and the clause-external position). We observe that the syntactic position explains the formal properties of *say* as a discourse marker. Second, various pragmatic functions of *say* are classified into five categories: introducing some new relevant information, signaling optional specification of a previously mentioned information unit, presenting a supposed situation, attracting the hearer's attention and serving as a self-repair device or a marker of hesitation. This paper proposes that, unlike other discourse markers, the pragmatic functions of *say* are largely dependent on the constructions in which it is involved (e.g. *let us say, I should say, that is to say*, etc.). (Seoul National University)

Keywords: discourse marker, formal property, clause-internal/external, pragmatic function, information unit

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

Within the past fifteen years or so, there has been an increasing interest in the study of discourse markers. I examine a discourse marker *say* in the present paper. My understanding of the individual lexical item *say* as a discourse marker is quite based on Schiffrin (1987), who defines discourse markers as sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk (Schiffrin, 1987: 31). In Schiffrin (1987), four types of discourse markers (henceforth, DMs) are analyzed in detail such as particles (*oh, well*), conjunctions (*and, but, or, so, because*), time deictics (*now, then*) and lexicalized clauses (*y'know, I mean*). However, as she mentions, 'not only have other analysts found other devices, but there are many which I have not considered' (Schiffrin, 1987: 327). Among those DMs which are not dealt with by Schiffrin (1987), the verb *say* used as a DM (e.g. *Say, can you lend me a dime?*) appeals me a lot. As far as I know from the previous researches, it appears that there are no detailed accounts on the use of DM *say*. For example, Andersen (2000) makes a sociolinguistic study of DM *like*. In his study DM *say* is briefly mentioned as a quotative expression and no detailed analysis is given for it. Based on a large corpus of naturally occurring data, my paper analyzes DM *say* in terms of its formal properties and pragmatic functions with an attempt to explain how a particular discourse marker gets its different interpretations.

1.2. Organization of the paper

The paper is organized as follows: in Section One I give an overview and make clear the focus and aim of the study; in Section Two a brief literature review is presented by outlining and discussing some major theoretical perspectives on DMs; in

Section Three, I discuss the types of data and data collection for my study. Moreover, the methodology applied to the study is also dealt with; section Four is the main part of the paper. First, I divide the examples of *say* into two groups in terms of their syntactic positions (i.e., the clause-internal position and the clause-external position) and suggest that the syntactic position explains the formal properties of *say* as a DM. Second, various pragmatic functions of *say* are classified into five categories. Then based on the analysis of *say*, I put forward a proposed interpretation on *say*'s pragmatic functions; in section Five, I conclude the paper and suggest a further research.

2. Brief literature review

In the current section I give a brief overview of the previous studies on DMs. Generally speaking, there are four major research efforts.

2.1. Schiffrin (1987): Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics

As mentioned by in Fraser (1999), Schiffrin (1987) can be treated as the first and the most detailed study on DMs. In Schiffrin (1987), on the basis of data collected during sociolinguistic interviews, 11 discourse markers *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, y'know, and I mean* are analyzed in detail. As suggested by Schiffrin (1987), DMs are used on different planes of talk: exchange structures, action structures, idea structures, participation frameworks, and information states, which can be treated as a discourse model containing five planes of analysis. However, as noted by Hansen (1998), the identification of the five discourse planes is problematical for one

of the reasons that they are not defined independently of the use of markers, and it is therefore unclear how coherence options can be realized in the absence of markers (Hansen, 1998: 25). As to the question: what do markers add to discourse coherence?, Schiffrin proposes that DMs provide contextual coordinates for utterances (Schiffrin, 1987: 326). In this sense, it is the integrative function which DMs serve in discourse that makes them contribute to discourse coherence.

2.2. Fraser: Grammatical-pragmatic Perspective

The second approach to the study of DMs is provided by Fraser (1988, 1990, 1993). In his works, by focusing on what DMs are and what their grammatical status is, Fraser presents his grammatical-pragmatic perspective on DMs. In contrast with Schiffrin, who suggests that paralinguistic features and non-verbal gestures are possible DMs, Fraser sees a DM as a linguistic expression only. Two characteristics of a DM are generalized as follows. (See Fraser (1999)).

- (a) It has a core meaning which can be enriched by the context;
- (b) It signals the relationship that the speaker intends between the utterance the DM introduces and the foregoing utterance.

Additionally, Fraser also classifies DMs according to what type of relationship they signal.

2.3. Blakemore: Relevance Theory

Blakemore (1987, 1992) provides the third theoretical perspective on DMs, which is based on the framework of relevant

theory. In Blakemore (1987), she works on a group of DMs which exemplify what is called semantic constraints on relevance. In her study, DMs are characterized as a type of Gricean conventional implicature. She also focuses on the issue of how discourse connectives (a label for DMs) play a constraining role on implicatures. In terms of the semantic property of DMs, Blakemore proposes that DMs have only a procedural meaning, rather than a representational meaning. In Blakemore (1992), a tripartite classification of discourse connectives is offered according to the way their host utterance is intended to achieve relevance. Among them are: (i) connectives used to introduce contextual implications (e.g. *so*); (ii) connectives concerned with the strengthening of such implications (e.g. *after all*); (iii) connectives used to introduce denials (e.g. *however*).

2.4. Knot & Dale (1994) et al.: Discourse Coherence Relations Theory

The fourth approach on the study of DMs is related to the research work in the field of discourse coherence. Knot & Dale (1994) and other researchers including Mann and Thompson (1987, 1988), Hobbs (1985), Sanders et al. (1992), and Hovy (1995), provide different accounts of discourse coherence. Among those accounts, the use of DMs, which they label as cue phrases, proves helpful sometimes to make the discourse relations more explicit. In a sense, this approach may be treated as an interesting attempt to seek the functions of DMs in signaling discourse relations.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1. Types of data and data collection

The data used for the present study is drawn from two sources: one is BNC (British National Corpus) and the other is interview transcriptions on internet. In the paper I do not give a separate treatment to these two types of data, despite the fact that they might have slight differences in nature. It is clear that a sufficient number of examples of *say* are necessary and important for an analysis and generalization to be made in the study. However, *say* as a particular DM appears much less frequent than other DMs, e.g., *well* and *okay*. As Andersen (2000) suggests, the frequency of some DMs is significantly lower than other commonly used DMs. For instance, *like* as a DM occurs only with a frequency of 4.4 tokens per thousand words in COLT corpus. Within the scope of my data, I draw 500 tokens of *say* from BNC, of which 20 tokens are removed for they are used as a non-DM. In addition to 480 tokens of DM *say* from BNC, I collect 164 examples of *say* which actually occur as a DM in the interview conversations from internet transcriptions.

3.2. Methodology

As much important as the data used in the present analysis, an appropriate methodology of the study is also very important. In accordance with methodology for Conversational Analysis, I give both descriptive and interpretive accounts of DM *say* in the study. By examining the data I describe the syntactic positions of DM *say* in the given utterances where it actually occurs and aim to capture its formal properties. On the other hand, by focusing on the pragmatic contexts in which *say* is used as a DM, I classify the pragmatic functions of *say* into five categories with an attempt to provide an explanation of how a particular

discourse marker gets its different interpretations.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Formal properties

From the examples of *say* in the data we can observe that DM *say* occurs in various syntactic positions. In general, all the examples of *say* can be divided into two groups in terms of their syntactic positions: i.e., the clause-internal position and the clause-external position. Before we consider the case of *say* in the clause-internal position, it is worth noting that in many cases DM *say* can be seen in relation to more than one phrases (either the same or different types) within a clause. For example, in the sentence like 'Sure, but nobody would be able to pay a prescription, **say**, of \$6745, would they? ' DM *say* can be considered either in relation to a small phrasal constituent PP[of \$6745], or in relation to a larger phrasal constituent NP[a prescription of \$6745], or VP[pay a prescription of \$6745], etc. For convenience of analysis, I have underlined and bracketed those phrases under discussion in each example cited in the following section.

4.1.1. The clause-internal position

4.1.1.1. The alternative syntactic positions of *say*

Firstly, let us examine the following examples of *say* in relation to VPs, focusing on the underlined and bracketed parts.

- (1) a. Sam Varg hee: How does the Domain Name System work to [resolve, **say**, the name theage.com.au]?
b. Q: So this would [take, **say**, Coast Guard] from

Commerce and the Immigration portion of the INS --

- (2) a. HWL: 'But we could put them out of business if we, [say, used sealing wax, or special security envelopes] ...';
- b. ARR 196 Has the god meme, [say, become associated with any other particular memes], and does this association assist the survival of each of the participating memes?
- c. CK: The role it actually plays is that of an exclamation, or a signal to another person that he can now expect me to, [say, continue a series] according to a formula.

It can be noted that in each sentence above DM *say* occurs either within the VP or immediately before the VP. In example (1), *say* is inserted between the verb and nominal complement while it is positioned preceding the VP in example (2).

Secondly, like the instances of *say* which occurs within or before VPs, many examples of *say* are observed to have a quite similar position in relation to PPs. This is evident from the following data.

- (3) a. Thomas: This is Nancy's specialty, but there are some very good explanations of some of the concepts that aren't always made clear [in, say, a journal article].
- b. A6M 820 The underlying assumption was that, if other factors were reasonably favourable, capital formation and exports would [within, say, a generation] reach the level where concessional finance was no longer necessary.
- (4) a. McGHEE: If an incident was, [say, in L.A.], and something happened in New York, and the vaccines were kept in Chicago, I mean, would that be useful? would they be useful?

- b. ANO 1166 The writer talks about being on board the cruiser after school in the afternoon or, [say, around 4 p.m.].

It is clear that DM *say* in example (3) is positioned between the preposition and nominal complement while it is immediately followed by the PP in (4).

Thirdly, within the scope of my data we can find a great number of examples of DM *say* which occurs immediately before NPs, including all the cases where *say* is positioned within VPs such as the ones shown in (1) or within PPs in (3) above. By contrast, let us look at some other instances of DM *say*'s position in relation to NPs, i.e., the position of *say* within a complex NP.

- (5) a. Robinson: But would you accept that [somebody, say, living in a regional area], if that \$52 made the difference between purchasing something that they enjoyed or just having to scrape by.
- b. CBW 991 During [the five years, say, of a franchise], they will work out whether there's a long-term business that's worth investing in.
- c. FNW 1131 SO,'he continued,'if you had [a tall skyscraper, say, with people living at the top], they will think everything at the bottom has shrunk --; been squashed down --; compared to normal.'

Note here that the head noun of the complex NPs outlined and bracketed in each sentence above is immediately followed by a modifier. In each case, DM *say* is positioned between the head noun and its post-modifier.

Fourthly, let us now take a look at some instances of *say*'s position in relation to APs (i.e. Adjectival Phrases) shown in the following.

- (6) a. JMS: But if the person who invents it is, [say, socially influential], other people will try to pick up on what she means by it.
b. TP: As affectionate --; loving --; or was your relationship with her, [say, less intimate]?'

It is clear to us that in the examples above *say* is positioned immediately before the AP, which functions as a predicate in each sentence.

4.1.1.2. Some observations on formal properties of *say* in the clause-internal position

Before we proceed any further with our discussion about *say* in the clause-external position, let us generalize some formal properties of the clause-internal *say*. From the examples we have cited in the previous section, it can be observed that DM *say* can freely occur in a variety of syntactic positions in relation to different types of phrases, such as VPs, PPs, NPs, and APs, etc. However, it is noteworthy that there seems to be some minor constraints on its clause-internal position. For example, by examining the instances of *say* which occurs before the NPs, again including all the cases where *say* is positioned within VPs or PPs, we observe that there are no cases where *say* occurs in a position between the pre-modifier (e.g. a determiner or a quantifier) and the head noun. Let us consider the following three sentence pairs. Two relevant examples given in the previous

section are repeated in (7) and (8) below.

- (7) a. Sam Varg: How does the Domain Name System work to resolve, [**say**, the name theage.com.au]?
??a'. Sam Varg: How does the Domain Name System work to resolve [the, **say**, name theage.com.au]?
(8) a. A6M 820 The underlying assumption was that, if other factors were reasonably favourable, capital formation and exports would within, [**say**, a generation] reach the level where concessional finance was no longer necessary.
??a'. A6M 820 The underlying assumption was that, if other factors were reasonably favourable, capital formation and exports would within [a, **say**, generation] reach the level where concessional finance was no longer necessary.
(9) a. C9K 872 This means that in a playing situation, if the patch has, [**say**, too much or too little delay], it can be altered simply by turning the control.
??a'. C9K 872 This means that in a playing situation, if the patch has [too much or too little, **say**, delay], it can be altered simply by turning the control.

It is quite clear that the second member (with two question marks ??) of each sentence pair above is unnatural or much less acceptable than the first one of the same pair. Many other similar examples can be found in the data. Thus it appears that DM *say* tends not to occur in a position where it is immediately preceded by the pre-modifier of a head noun such as a determiner or a quantifier.

Moreover, from the data relevant to DM *say*'s syntactic position in relation to NPs, it needs to be noted that the NP which immediately follows DM *say* is frequently a measurable or

numeral expression. This observation is clearly evident from many examples like the ones in (10), focusing on the italicized parts.

- (10)a. BARBARA: I think that when we look back [in, **say**, even just *ten years*], critics, artists, cultural historians will look back at the video art of the 60s, the 70s and the 80s.
- b. John R. Lott Jr: Most of the rest [looked at, **say**, *24 countries or 24 cities*] within a single year.
- c. RW: Which would be complicated by the presence of diseases. So perhaps the optimal assay to test a candidate compound might [take, **say**, *five months*] and occur at between 20 and 25 months of age in a mouse. I'm just thinking out loud, it need not be precisely that way.
- d. FYS 908 Equally, if the access road is cul-de-sac the design guide may provide for [a maximum permissible length of up to, **say**, *300 m*] or a limit on the number of dwelling using the road.

What needs to be mentioned here is the formal property of clause-internal *say* relevant to the examples in (10) above seems very closely related to its pragmatic functions. However, since I intend to make an investigation on the potential relations between the formal properties and the pragmatic functions of DM *say* in the further study, I treat it here as a formal property despite the fact that it might be unsafe to do so.

4.1.2. The clause-external position

4.1.2.1. Two major syntactic positions

Recall our previous discussion that in the clause-internal

position *say* appears to be free in various syntactic positions regardless of some minor constraints. By contrast, in the case of the clause-external position DM *say* does not occur so freely as it does in the clause-internal cases. They commonly either occur in the main clause-initial position or collocate with a conjunction before the subordinated clause. It is evidently observable from the following data, focusing on the underlined parts.

- (11)a. **Say**, you live in New York and have an interview in Florida on Tuesday and an interview in Oregon and then back to New York.
- b. **Say**, he was telling me how in your mother's day there were coal fires in every bedroom and how...
- (12)a. BMM 2331 If, say, my left breast becomes enlarged, I do not have to contemplate whether it is a result of taking illegal substances.
- b. J14 1227 Moreover, it might be possible to resolve some of the difficulties that might arise before, say, eviction or redundancy became real possibilities.
- c. HPU 296 An observational study of a production line, **say**, although it might want to talk a great deal about the alternative effects of such work, could not make use of an attitude scale in the way that a questionnaire study might.

Note that in example (11) *say* is positioned immediately before the main clause while it immediately precedes the subordinated clause in a collocation with a conjunction such as *if*, *before*, or *although* in (12)a, b, and c, respectively. If we take a closer look at the examples in (12), it can be further noted that DM *say* can occur either immediately after the conjunction like the cases in (12a) and 12(b), or immediately before the conjunction like the

one in (12c).

4.1.2.2. Some observations on formal properties of *say* in the clause-external position

As suggested by the examples of *say* in (12) above, it appears quite common that the clause-external *say* often collocates with a conjunction. Apart from it, an interesting property of *say* can be observable from some other instances in the data. Let us look at the following examples.

- (13) a. Anyway, say, packagers, their wrappings have become lighter.
b. Say, well I'm awfully sorry I'm off at five but I got to be back at eight.
c. 'Well, say, you saw a wolf running at you, winter-lean, snapping.';
d. I mean, say, the Bishop's door was unlocked when you lock up?';
e. You know, say, if they wanted to get you three C's and you got three A's shut up Sam!

Note that the DM *say* in each example above occurs in the clause-external position and collocates with another single discourse marker such as *anyway*, *well*, *I mean*, or *you know*, respectively. More interestingly, from some additional examples we can observe that *say* occurs in a cluster of discourse markers, as evident from the data below.

- (14) a. And, I mean, say, if there's apples or anything like that, go and say, help yourself to apples he'll fill his bag until

- he can't get another thing in!
- b. *So, I mean, say,* in about three or four years time you you'd have the same level of cover.
 - c. *Well, I mean, say,* it's like that where you just polishing with a cloth or something.
 - d. *Cos, erm, you know, say,* we picked dad up from work and we used to come here straight from work didn't we for tea?

Note that DM *say* collocates with two different discourse markers *and* and *I mean* in (14a), with *so* and *I mean* in (14b), with *well* and *I mean* in (14c), and with three different ones such as *cos*, *erm* and *you know* in (14d).

Through the discussion so far, we have showed some different formal properties of DM *say* in terms of its different syntactic positions, either in the clause-internal position or in the clause-external position. In other words, it suggests that the syntactic position explains the formal properties of *say* as a DM.

4.2. Pragmatic functions

4.2.1. A classification of *say*'s pragmatic functions

After dealing with the formal properties of DM *say*, now let us turn our attention to its pragmatic functions. Based on the data, the different pragmatic functions of *say* are classified into five categories as follows.

4.2.1.1. *Say*: to introduce some new relevant information

It is clear that a normal conversation is commonly seen as a process of information exchange between the speaker and its

addressee. Within this process both the speaker and the hearer need to adjust the status of information. For the case of the speaker, before issuing some new information he/she has to make it clear whether the information he/she intends to give is new to the hearer or not. On the other hand, in the conversation the hearer has to fulfil two tasks: i.e., to recognize old information and to receive new information. In the data, many examples of DM *say* can be identified to serve as an introducer of some new information relevant to the given discourse context. Let us discuss this pragmatic function of *say* with the data in (15) below.

- (15) a. FEU 408 The time of 24 hours might be splitted into, say, 20 hours for new material and four hours for reviews of past material or 18 hours and six: hours.
- b. CBT 3522 The spread is estimated to be, say, 160 basis points above the gift but will not be known for certain until issue day.
- c. K8S 441 We'll take, say, food from you to-morrow.
- d. CUB 2735 Filling requirements still apply when, say, the articles are altered informally; and --.

Note that what immediately follows the DM *say* in each example above is not only some new information but the one which is relevant to the same context. In example (15a), the underlined part '20 hours for new material and four hours for reviews of past material or 18 hours and six: hours' involves some information which the speaker believes new to the hearer and intends to issue to him/her. It can be further noted that this part of information is often obligatory to the whole utterance context in which it involves. An essentially identical account is applicable

to the rest examples given in (15b–d) above.

4.2.1.2. *Say* to signal optional specification of a previously mentioned information unit

As I have mentioned in the previous section, a conversation is a process of information exchange. In most conversations the speaker often attempts to calculate how much information the hearer needs in order to make a successful interpretation. Therefore, information specification might be optionally provided by the speaker according to his/her judgement on whether the previously mentioned information unit needs to be specified or not. By examining the data we can observe that in many instances DM *say* functions to signal the specification of a previously mentioned information unit in the given utterance. In order to make an exemplary analysis let us consider the following data.

- (16)a. CA 1 566 The only easy cure is make the winding on in alternative directions, **say** ten turns each way.
- b. Tony Gray: They would offer an interest rate that would be guaranteed by the government, **say** 5% or 6%, and super-annuation funds would invest in those bonds.
- (17)a. If the rollers have a circumference of three feet, **say** one meter, then the slab will move forward six feet, **say** two meters.
- b. EX2 1058 Putting it algebraically, the management's problem is: where W is social benefit as defined above and for simplicity we have assumed two inputs only, **say** labour and capital.

Note that in example (16a) the unspecified information unit immediately preceding DM *say* is 'make the winding on in alternative directions'. Following this part of information, the specification of it is immediately provided by the speaker in case the unspecified information unit previously mentioned could not be successfully interpreted or inferred by the hearer. Thus one selected instance, i.e., 'ten turns each way' is given as the specifier of 'make the winding on in alternative directions'. Similarly, in (16b) in order to make the previously unspecified information unit 'an interest rate that would be guaranteed by the government' more explicit or precise to the hearer, the speaker provides the hearer with two selected instances, i.e., '5%' or '6%'. However, in (17a), the previously mentioned information unit 'three feet' or 'six feet', immediately preceding *say*, is specified by presenting a more explicit restatement of what immediately precedes it, that is, 'one meter' is a restatement of 'three feet' and 'two meters' of 'six feet'. A similar account applies to the instance in (17b). The above examples suggest that the speaker may provide the information specification by various means, for example, either by giving one or more selected instances or by presenting a more explicit restatement of what immediately precedes it. Regardless the different manners of specification, it is clearly observable that DM *say* in each example of (16) and (17) is used to signal the specification of a previously mentioned information unit in the given utterance.

4.2.1.3. *Say*: to present a supposed situation

When we examine the following data, it can be noted that in each example of (18) the part which immediately follows DM *say*

is a supposed situation where something might possibly happen or be true despite the fact that the purpose of speaker to present a certain supposed situation might be different accordingly in the conversations.

- (18) a. Darren A. Narayan: These are rare, but in some cases you may have on-campus interviews close together, either in time or location. For example, say you live in New York and have an interview in Florida on Tuesday and an interview in Oregon on Wednesday. You might try to book a trip that goes from New York to Florida to Oregon and then back to New York. In a similar situation if you have interviews at schools that ...
- b. O'BRIEN: I mean I would like to understand this a little bit. Say, you have a \$2 billion surplus next year, the following year \$4 billion, \$5 billion, \$12 billion. What are you doing with those surpluses?
- c. McGHEE: So say if we did start stockpiling, say antidotes for anthrax, where do you think we should be keeping those? If an incident was say in L.A., and something happened in New York and the vaccines were kept in Chicago, I mean, would that be useful? Would they be useful?

In example (18a), the speaker provides the hearer with a supposed situation (or case), i.e., 'you live in New York and have an interview in Florida on Tuesday and an interview in Oregon on Wednesday' with a purpose to give a further explanation of what immediately precedes it, that is, 'In some cases you may have on-campus interviews close together, either in time or location.' More importantly, it needs to be noted that

DM *say* plays the pragmatic role of presenting the supposed situation. In each example of (18b) and (18c) DM *say* serves a similar pragmatic function to the one in (18a). The minor difference is that in the former two cases the supposed situation is provided by the speaker with the purpose of asking for a further explanation or of trying to get more information on what is under discussion. Therefore, it is noteworthy that a relevant question such as the one in (18b) 'What are you doing with those surpluses?' or 'where do you think we should be keeping those?' in (18c) often follows the supposed situation in the utterance.

4.2.1.4. *Say*: to attract the hearer's attention

When we take a first look at the data cited in (19) and (20) below, it appears that the syntactic position of DM *say* in each example is quite similar to that of *say* in the data given for analyzing the pragmatic function of *say* to present a supposed situation. However, a further examination suggests that DM *say* here fulfills a very different pragmatic function.

- (19) a. CHO 3122 '**Say**, Brunt, what do you think?'
b. HM2 89 **Say**, what on earth are they taking a picture of that for?
- (20) a. H0R 2391 **Say**, how can you expect me to live here!
b. JA4 971 Because if you phone these guys up and **say**, What a waste of time.

Note that *say* in each example above is not used to present a supposed situation, but to attract the hearer's attention when the speaker is about to issue some question(s) to the hearer or to

express some personal feelings (e.g. surprise or pleasure) or to show certain attitude (e.g. disagreement). From the two examples in (19) we can observe that *say* is used to attract the hearer's attention to the question which is about to be asked by the speaker, such as 'what do you think?' in the former one and 'what on earth are they taking a picture of that for?' in the latter. With a slight difference, in (20a) by using DM *say* the hearer's attention is attracted to the speaker's personal feeling of surprise with an exclamation 'how can you expect me to live here!' while in (20b) the DM *say* is used to attract the hearer's attention to the speaker's firm disagreement on the hearer's behaviour of 'phoning these guys up' for he/she believes that it is really 'a waste of time' to do so.

4.2.1.5. *Say*: to serve as a self-repair device or a marker of hesitation

As we have mentioned in the earlier section, DM *say* often collocates with some other discourse markers such as *anyway*, *well*, *I mean*, or *you know*, etc., in the clause-external position. By examining some relevant data, it is noteworthy that the pragmatic functions of *say* in the examples cited in (21) and (22) are difficult to be accounted for by any pragmatic functions of *say* I have discussed so far. Thus it seems that some other categories need to be considered.

(21) Erm, I remember years ago, well, well, **say** months ago, erm, one of the local estate agents were writing in one of the property news I think it was or the Advertiser, saying now is the time to buy, erm,

(22) Lottman: Well, I mean, **say**, you know, the co-production of the F-16 as an example, does that

represent like a large leap forward to those countries that have, you know –

It can be observed from the example (21) that the part which immediately follows the DM *say* involves a self-repair of what immediately precedes it in the utterance. In this instance the speaker makes a self-correction on (I remember) 'years ago' by replacing it with 'months ago'. It clearly shows that DM *say* here serves as a device of self-repair. Now let us consider the example in (22). Note that four different discourse markers *well*, *I mean*, *say*, and *you know* sequentially co-occur in one and the same utterance. Despite the minor differences of the pragmatic functions each discourse marker might have in different conversational contexts respectively, it is clear that in this utterance the speaker shows some difficulties in planning his/her utterances or ideas. Therefore we argue that DM *say* here might be treated as a surface marker of hesitation. Considering the very similar formal properties of DM *say* in these two cases, I classify these two pragmatic subfunctions of *say*, i.e., serving as a self-repair device and a marker of hesitation into one category.

4.2.2. A proposed interpretation on *say*'s different pragmatic functions

From the discussion above we can see that DM *say* serves various pragmatic functions in conversational English. As a result, an interesting question might be raised, that is, how a particular DM like *say* gets its different pragmatic functions. By examining some other data relevant to the constructions in which a lexical verb *say* involves, such as *let us say*, *I should say*, *that is to say*, etc., we can clearly observe that most of such constructions

can occur in the quite similar syntactic positions where DM *say* often does in a given utterance. This is partially evident from the examples of the construction *let us say*, which are grouped in (23) below.

- (23) a. <within VP> EBW 1377 Finally, foreign museums started contacting the Ministry of Culture and asking if they could [buy, let us say, a picture] by Malevich or Popova, and then it became clear that I had the pictures.
- b. <before VP> BNL 183 A family, [let us say, spend their entire life] in suburbia.
- c. <within PP> FMP 947 But sir we do have some doubts as to whether we would be able to respond to any that should arrive [at, let us say, five o'clock] tomorrow afternoon, by, let us say, close of play on Wednesday.
- d. <before PP> HWM 3051 So I naturally had to bear in mind the possibility that the jewel had not been stolen at all by any outside party, but `;caused to disappear';, [let us say, by the Strattons themselves].
- e. <before NP> CBR 280 Shortly after, he makes correct use of grammatical particles such as `;do'; and, [let us say, the whole auxiliary system of English], and does so across the board, that is, in questions, assertions, negations, etc.
- f. <within NP> CM8 449 Only in an evolutionary context are these tokens [the beginnings, let us say, of planning or choice].
- g. <before AP> HWM 3054 In itself, however, as an artefact set with precious stones, it was, [let us say, `;priceable]';,
- h. <before the main clause> MR. POLLACK: ... If I make a film

about 1850 in America, and mountain men, **let us say**, I spend a year researching like crazy until I know exactly who you make a trap for a beaver, ...

i. <before the subordinated clause> CM8 1299 (The`almost'; allows for exceptional circumstances where, **let us say**, killing is the only way to obtain food (1979: 55, 105).)

Note that the construction *let us say* occurs in the quite similar positions where DM *say* actually does in the examples cited in the earlier section, i.e., within VP, before VP, within PP, before PP, before NP, within NP, before AP, before the main clause, or before the subordinated clause. In other words, DM *say* can replace *let us say* in each example above, at least, at a syntactic level. It can be evidently observed from some other data cited in the following part of this section.

More interestingly, by examining the data relevant to the constructions like *let us say*, we can further observe that the different pragmatic functions of DM *say* are largely dependent upon the contextual use of the constructions in which it involves such as *let us say/let's say*, *that is to say*, *I say/I'll say/I was gonna say*, *I should say*, *what shall I say/how shall I say/how can I say*, or *you say*, etc. Let us discuss it with special reference to the uses of such constructions in different contexts.

First, we observe that the construction *let us say* or *let's say* in the example group (24) is used to introduce some information which is new and relevant to each particular context.

- (24)a. CM8 143 Her passenger, **let us say**, observed that she braked suddenly to avoid some pigeons and then --.
- b. TP: -- we can actually get, **let's say**, a six month window in the life span and --.

- c. FT6 445 The finances for, **let us say**, a female client are organised as follows.
- d. F9R 2347 If I appear, **let us say**, disenchanted, it is because I have reason to be.
- e. JSN 689 We can do it, and if you do, I don't know, say five calls a day, **let us say** because I'm not making any rules, erm, --;

As clear to us, it is implausible to believe that the hearer might have already known or be sure to know the part of information introduced by DM *say* before it is uttered by the speaker in such a way like [Her passenger --], [we can actually get --], [The finances for --], [If I appear --], [We can do it, and if you do, I don't know, say five calls a day, --] in (24a-e), respectively. Thus we can propose that the first pragmatic function of DM *say* we mentioned earlier, i.e., introducing some new and relevant information, is basically dependent on the use of the constructions in the examples above.

Second, in example (25a) the construction *let us say* is used when something immediately following it is mentioned as an example. Note that either 'a Jew', or 'a socialist', or 'a South German' in the sentence is mentioned as a selected instance for 'a member of a minority'. In this way, the previously mentioned information unit 'one is a of course a member of minority' is specified. In (25b) and (25c) the construction *that is to say* is used to indicate that the speaker is about to express the same idea more clearly or precisely. In other words, what immediately follows the construction *that is to say* is actually a restatement or a further explanation of the previously unspecified information unit, that is, 'third leaf' is restated as 'when they are three years old' in (25b) and 'using much movement but little strength, as opposed to isometric which uses much strength and little

movement' is a further explanation of 'aerobic' in (25c), respectively. Thus, it is clear that the use of such constructions in each sentence of the example (25) provides direct evidence for the second pragmatic function of DM *say* we have discussed earlier, i.e., signaling optional specification of a previously mentioned information unit.

- (25)a. KRH 1796 If one is of course a member of a minority, **let us say**, one is a Jew or erm a socialist or erm a South German, erm --;
- b. C8M 1154 No vines may be brought into production for Champagne until they have attained their `;third leaf';, **that is to say**, when they are three years old.
- c. EWX 579 The exercise should be" aerobic", **that is to say** using much movement but little strength, as opposed to isometric which uses much strength and little movement.

Third, the construction *let us say* in each example of (26a-c) below has contextually the sense of 'supposition' or 'assumption'.

- (26) a. FLY 154 So **let us say** you've been hit in the eye accidentally by a hockey ball
- b. FF0 539 **Let us say** it occurs to you that a story in which a husband kills his wife without any apparent motive would be" a marvellous idea".
- c. CE5 3208 `;**Let us say** I might grow old and die trying to decide whether to act intellectually or emotionally.;

Note that the part immediately following the construction *let us say* is a supposed or assumed situation (or case) given by the

speaker. In (26a), the supposed situation is 'you've been hit in the eye accidentally by a hockey ball' which is quite possible to take place or might be true. An essentially similar account applies to (26c). In (26b) the speaker offers the hearer a supposed situation, that is, 'it occurs to you that a story in which a husband kills his wife without any apparent motive', with a purpose of giving an explanation of 'what a marvellous idea would be'. It is noteworthy again that the third pragmatic function of *say* discussed earlier, i.e., presenting a supposed situation, is quite similar to the contextual use of the construction *let us say* in (26).

Fourth, note that the construction *I say*, *I'll say*, or *I was just gonna say* in each sentence of the example group (27) is followed either by a question or by an attitudinal statement, or by an exclamation.

- (27)a. H9Y 702 `;I **say**, what do you think about Fergie going skiing when she's pregnant?';
 b. FEE 787 I **say**, how you know that her boss?
 c. H8X 1895 'I **say**, Miss Abbott, you certainly go to the heat of things -- ';
 d. EDJ 1917 `;I **say**, what a lot of flowers. ';
 e. FSP 1031 `;I **say**, how jolly enterprising!';
 f. FPF 1298 I'll **say**, how're things?
 g. KD0 2740 I **was just gonna say**, what games have we lost?

In (27a) and (27b), the construction *I say* is used to attract the hearer's attention to the question which is about to be issued by the speaker. A similar account is applicable to each example of (27f) and (27g). In (27c) the speaker uses *I say* to attract the

hearer's attention to the former's certain attitude to the behaviour of the latter. However, it can be clearly seen that what immediately follows the construction *I say* in each example of (27d) and (27e) is an exclamation to express a certain feeling, i.e., pleasure. One characteristic shared by the examples in (27) is that the construction *I say* is used to attract the hearer's attention to what immediately follows it, i.e., a question, an attitudinal statement, or an exclamation, in particular. Thus it suggests that the fourth function of DM *say* mentioned earlier is also dependent on the contextual use of the constructions discussed above.

Fifth, it is obvious that the construction *I should say* in example (28) is used to indicate some self-correction (repair) which immediately follows it. By contrast, the constructions *what shall I say*, *how shall I say*, *how can I say*, and *you say* in (29) are used to indicate a hesitation. Note that the use of such constructions is quite equivalent to the pragmatic function of DM *say*, i.e., serving as a self-repair device and a marker of hesitation.

- (28) a. FSP 1905 `;Ladies and Gentlemen Madam Chairman, I **should say**, ladies and gentlemen, my wife, my ex-wife...
- b. KD4 391 I mean did he take you this, I **should say**, did he take you this morning?
- (29) a. HES 398 Because he he he's done a a you know he he he's been a a a a **what shall I say**, a Well he's done a lot really to to to to to promote erm interest in engineering and all that and and he's done a lot in helping er to young men to become engineers and that you know.
- b. J9S 298 Miss is just saying to me that a quick review of her chart, er could indicate that we haven't got any clear

er **how shall I say**, clear indication, using the same word twice, that would point us to one sector only.

- c. KGU 527 ha, **how can I say**, what, whe when you're talking about fa, I mean fast moving consumer good are fast.
- d. G3Y 600 Er **you say**, well you know alright there are all these things I could do but erm er what, where do I think I re really want to work?

Based on the exemplary discussion above, we argue that the different pragmatic functions of DM *say* classified in the earlier section are evidently observed from the contextual uses of the constructions we have discussed. More specifically, unlike the cases of other discourse markers, the pragmatic functions of *say* are largely dependent on the constructions in which it is involved, such as *let us say*, *I should say*, *that is to say*, *I say*, or *what shall I say*, etc.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, in the paper I make an analysis of the use of *say* as a DM in conversational English by examining a large amount of naturally occurring data. Firstly, according to its distributional features in the given utterance, I generalize some formal properties of DM *say* either in the clause-internal position or in the clause-external position. Secondly, by focusing on the pragmatic context in which DM *say* is used, I classify its different pragmatic functions into five categories, namely, introducing some new relevant information, signaling optional specification of a previously mentioned information unit, presenting a supposed situation, attracting the hearer's attention

and serving as a self-repair device or a marker of hesitation. And finally my proposal, i.e., the pragmatic functions of DM *say* are largely dependent on the constructions in which it is involved, might shed some light on the issue of how a particular discourse marker gets its different interpretations.

In addition, although the present study has shown some minor constraints on *say*'s syntactic positions in a given utterance, however, a further study seems necessary to identify the other potential constraints as well as the possible relations between its formal properties and pragmatic functions. Moreover, although I have made an attempt to account for how a particular DM gets its different interpretations using the case of *say*, it appears that more relevant constructions of *say* within a larger size of data sample are required to be reanalyzed. The candidates for such further analysis might be, for example, *I'd say, as I/you/we/they say, or needless to say, etc.* Finally, it is suggested in the paper that as a particular DM, *say* originates in its contextual use as a lexical verb. Whether the analysis of DM *say* can provide evidence for that of other discourse markers such as *think* and *go, etc.*, needs to be reconsidered in a further research.

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