

# A Corpus-based study of *say* as a discourse marker

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**Jang, Eun-Young. 2004. A Corpus-based study of *say* as a discourse marker. *SNU Working Papers in English Language and Linguistics* 3, #-#. Discourse markers have been considered important element constituent of language performing various functions in discourse. This study focuses on the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker *say* which has been only regarded as categorized into classes of verbs with a sense of speaking, telling according to traditional speech categorization. The study attempts to account for the pragmatic functions of DM *say* synchronically and diachronically by examining the corpus of the data from switchboard corpus and the Oxford English dictionary, respectively. The pragmatic function of the DM *say* was classified into eight categories in the synchronic analysis: approximator; a signal to present the specified information a signal for exemplifying supposing a hypothetical situation; a signal of self-repair; a signal of topic change; an utterance terminator device; and an attracting device. On the other hand, five functions were identified in the diachronic analysis: attention attracting device, device of supposing a hypothetical situation; approximator; a signal to present the specified information; and a signal for exemplifying. The diachronic analysis reveals the chronicle order of the DM *says* function. The difference between the two analyses results reveals that the DM *says* function has changed slightly more specified. This study adds a pedagogical implication of teaching a discourse marker to improve the learners' communicative abilities suggesting some activities. (Seoul National University)**

**Keywords:** corpus, diachronic analysis, discourse marker, pragmatic function, *say*, synchronic analysis

## 1. Introduction

Discourse markers have been investigated to be an important component of language which have a variety of pragmatic functions in discourse. Discourse makers, also termed 'discourse particles' or 'discourse connectives,' can be defined as 'linguistic expressions used to signal the relation of an utterance to its immediate context, with the primary function of bringing to the listener's attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context' (Redeker 1991).

Discourse markers are pragmatic devices which contribute to discourse coherence by showing the relationship between preceding utterances and following utterances.

Though discourse markers do not affect the conceptual meaning of utterances, they reflect the speaker's intentions. Participants in discourse understand their conversation more easily because of the discourse coherence achieved by such discourse markers.

## 2. Literature review

In the literature a variety of discourse markers have been explored by many researchers.

Groz and Sidner (1986) provided a procedural description of discourse where discourse markers flag changes in both attentional and intentional state. In Rhetorical Structure Theory, discourse markers mark rhetorical relations between segments (Mann and Thompson 1988). The grammar of Quirk et al. (1985) subsumes most discourse markers within conjunctions.

Schiffrin's work (1987) on discourse markers constitutes a powerful foundation for comprehending the structure and social handling of language without being tied to a particular theory of discourse. His work also showed discourse marker function as aiding coherence and cohesion in text. Blakemore (1987) suggested that it might be possible to analyze certain discourse or pragmatic connectives as carrying procedural information about the inferential phase of comprehension. They indicate to the hearer what type of inferential process he is in, not encoding concepts which are the constituents of conceptual representations. In other words, they constrain the relevance of utterances in which they occur by indicating in what direction its implicatures are to be sought. Jucker (1993) also attempted to propose a unified account of discourse marker based on Wilson's relevance theory. In his accounts the discourse marker was regarded as a signpost which constrains the interpretation process namely indicating the most immediately accessible context is not the most relevant one for the interpretation of the upcoming utterance.

Though many different discourse markers have been explored, there have been some studies of *say* as a quotative marker but little attention on '*say*' as a discourse marker (Cukor-Avila 2002, D'Arcy and Tagliamonte 2002). '*Say*' has been only regarded as categorized into classes of verbs with a sense of 'speaking, telling' according to traditional speech categorization.

Lee (2003) categorized the function of the discourse marker (DM) *say* into 5 pragmatic functions: introducing some new relevant information, signaling an optional specification of a previously mentioned information unit, supposing a situation, attracting the hearer's attention, and finally acting as a self-repair device or marker of hesitation. And Lee(2004) classified DM *say* into three domains proposed by Erman(2001)<sup>1</sup>) in the study of pragmatic markers focus on *you know*: textual domain, social domain, and metalinguistic domain<sup>2</sup>).

In the analyses of Lee(2004)'s study, one of the DM *say*'s function, approximation belongs to the metalinguistic domain. Erman explains the function of approximator in the metalinguistic domain. The metalinguistic domain is "that the speaker by using them informs the addressee about her/his commitment to the truth of the proposition or judgement of the importance or value of what is being communicated."(Erman 2001:1338) DM *You know* as an approximator also functions as a face-saving mitigator and "an emphasize typically underscoring and rounding off an evaluative utterance"( Erman 2001:1341 ) Those functions can be categorized into the metalinguistic domain. But DM *say* as an approximator only influences the following local information not "indicating expressive attitude of speaker toward the propositional contents of the utterance" Therefore, Lee(2004)'s classification of approximator into metalinguistic domain is not proper. Lee (2004) combines exemplification function and specification function into one category. It might be proper classification considering exemplification is one of ways to specify the prior information. However, many instances of data show much different usage between those two functions. Hence, the present study divided them into two categories.

The overall purpose of this paper is to investigate the pragmatic functions

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1) Erman(2001) proposed three functional domains as follows:

Text-monitors: Discourse markers, Editing markers

Social monitors: Interactive markers, Comprehension-securing markers

Metalinguistic monitors: Approximators, Hedges, Emphasisers

These three domains do not have a clear-cut boundaries. See Erman(2001) for more detailed description.

2) In the Lee(2004)'s study, each pragmatic function belongs to one of the following three domains:

① textual domain: quotative, exemplification/specification, supposition, hesitation, self-repair, utterance terminator

② social domain: subject shifter, attention attracter

③ metalinguistic domain: approximation, emphasize

of the discourse marker '*say*' in spoken discourse and also to examine them diachronically while testing the functions of the prior study.

### **3. Data & Methodology**

This study will examine the DM *say*'s pragmatic functions on the basis of data from Switchboard corpus and the Oxford English dictionary. Switchboard corpus is American Spoken data which contains about 2430 conversations averaging 6 minutes in length; about 3 million words of text, spoken by over 500 speakers of both sexes from every major dialect of American English. Among 4103 occurrences of *say*, excluding the non-discourse marker *say* and non-representative example, all the remaining 131 occurrences of *say* were analyzed. In the data in the Oxford English Dictionary, I extracted all 13 occurrences where *say* is considered to be used as discourse marker and analyzed them. The instances of *say* were analyzed in terms of pragmatic functions. Based on conversational analysis, I attempted to account for the pragmatic functions of the DM *say*. I identified 8 functions while explaining how they can be interpreted and found 5 functions which have been diachronically in the data of Oxford English Dictionary.

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1 The synchronic analysis**

#### **4.1.1 DM *say* as an approximator device.**

According to Jakobson (1960), one of the six functions of language is to serve as a vehicle to transmit the information about the world to one who does not share that information. From the point of view of The Relevance Theory, communication involves two information processing devices. One of them is to cause the other to come to share some information either by the decoding of a linguistic expression or by an inferential process. In the process of exchanging information, when the information in the following utterance is not certain, but approximate, the DM *say* precedes the utterance. In many instances, the DM *say* can be considered to be used as a signaling device of approximate information. The DM *say* used as an approximator device can be replaced with the adverb 'approximately'. When used in this function, the new information prefaced with '*say*' often involves numbers

such as those relating to time and day. The reason for this may be that the speaker needs some processing time when they mention about numbers. Besides the numerical information, the DM *say* is also used to signal approximate information in response to a previous question. You can observe some of these instances below. In (1) and in (2) time period are introduced by using *say*. In the example (1) below, in the information on when to buy Nissan, speaker A's car, the numerical information ' nine months ago' is placed after DM *say*.

(1)

SPEAKER\_B: so i'll go ahead and get it  
SPEAKER\_A: uh-huh you know the only thing i'm looking at right now um i just i just bought you know the Nissan that i've got about uh say nine months ago i guess it was  
SPEAKER\_A: so the only thing that that would get me to change cars right now would be if see at the moment i'm single

The next example (2) shows DM *say* can be precede the numerical information of an appointment time.

(2)

SPEAKER\_A: being a dental hygienist works by appointments so she if she has a day scheduled where she has to get the kids into the day care to of them take them to school and she has uh a  
SPEAKER\_B: yeah  
SPEAKER\_B: right  
SPEAKER\_A: an appointment say at eight thirty and she has to be all the way across town at her office at eight thirty then she needs to have them ride the bus one way and i'll get off in time to hopefully pick both of them up and not have the day care center in the other direction

One of the interesting findings in this section is that many examples preceding DM *say* functioning as an approximator device show uncertainty of numerical information. Also those examples represent collocation of *say* with expression manifesting uncertainty such as I guess, about, maybe.

#### **4.1.2 DM *say* to signal specification of a previously mentioned information unit**

Another use of DM *say* is to signal that information is added to specify the previous information. In the process of information exchange, the

immediately given context is extended and specified by the addition of further information which is prefaced by the DM *say*. Thus, the DM *say* serves as a link between two utterances, closely connecting the former discourse context. Its function can be observed in the data that follows.

(3)

SPEAKER\_A: now what did you just replace SPEAKER\_B: the timing chain well the camshaft timing chain SPEAKER\_A: now i'm not even familiar with what that where that is SPEAKER\_B: okay it's in the front of the engine uh say like directly behind the radiator or the water pump

In the example of (3), DM *say* precedes the additional information 'like directly behind the radiator or the water pump' to specify the prior information on the location of 'camshaft timing chain' which is 'in front of the engine'

(4)

SPEAKER\_B: but that same house here you'd pay almost six thousand dollars a year taxes on it SPEAKER\_A: wow wow that's pretty SPEAKER\_B: so it's uh SPEAKER\_B: so the question of whether to buy here or move to another county say drive SPEAKER\_B: twenty more miles north buy a condominium for approximately uh the same price maybe a little lower

The additional information 'drive 20 miles north, buy a condominium' specifies the previous information 'move to another county' by using the preceding DM *say*.

(5)

SPEAKER\_B: and they set it up manually so that they have all their spacings and formattings and tabs set manually SPEAKER\_A: um-hum SPEAKER\_A: and a[nd]- and um SPEAKER\_B: and um then when they have to make a change say they want to insert a paragraph they've got to go through the document and reset all the page breaks manually SPEAKER\_A: rewrite the whole thing

In (5) speaker B specifies his/her previous utterance by adding detailed information. The part "when they have to make a change" is specified by the following utterance 'they want to insert a paragraph', which is prefaced by

*say*.

#### 4.1.3 DM *say* as an exemplification device.

DM *say* can be used to signal an exemplification which makes the prior utterance more clear and explicit. Any information can be exemplified as you can observe in the following instances.

Here, the DM '*say*' can be substituted with 'for example', or 'for instance'

(6)

SPEAKER\_B: and If you had a people that have personal computers it would be much easier  
SPEAKER\_B: But um and then at the end of the year i- i totaled up what we were spending *say* for groceries or or entertainment or things like that and then this year i tried to keep it within

At the end of year, speaker B totaled up what they spend money on. DM *say* exemplified the subcategory of items money was sent on such as 'grocery' or 'entertainment'

(7)

SPEAKER\_A: yeah i know they must have a lot of tourism too but i don't see as much advertising there as you do in the baha[mas]- the *say* the bahamas  
SPEAKER\_B: yeah i don't know uh i i[t]-  
SPEAKER\_A: with uh *say* uh uh saint thomas uh virgin islands uh places like that

In (7), speaker A offers an information that Puerto Rico does not have as much advertisement as the Bahamas. After speaker B's responding, DM *say* precedes the exemplification of other places which have lots of advertisement.

(8)

SPEAKER\_A: that's true i didn't think about that like for instance uh if someone's working on heavy machinery or uh *say* driving trucks or buses city buses or something like that

In (8), speaker A added exemplification of working heavy machinery such as driving trucks or buses city buses. *say* marks to signal exemplification

(9)

SPEAKER\_B: how much pork do you buy for two people SPEAKER\_A: um well for two people um ame[rican]- uh if it's american style i'd buy a half a pound if you know we if you're just serving that but if you're serving another dish with it say the rice dish SPEAKER\_B: right

This example in (9) shows a slight different exemplified instance which does not include A or B the construction but DM *say* still performs the function of exemplification. 'Another dish' is exemplified by 'the rice dish' by the preceding DM *say*.

#### 4.1.4 DM *say* to suppose a hypothetical situation

The DM *say* is also used as a hypothesizing tactic where *say* prefaces an assumed situation which might happen. In this situation, the DM *say* can be replaced with 'if'

(10)

SPEAKER\_A: and so if your number is below four hundred you're not going to have to do it SPEAKER\_B: i see SPEAKER\_A: say it's between four hundred and six hundred you might have to do it depending how many people are in your class and you know like you the they right SPEAKER\_B: your age group or whate[ver]- yeah SPEAKER\_A: and if it's above six hundred you're going to have to do it and i got one thirty one

In the example of (10) above, speaker A supposes a hypothetical situation where the number is between 400 and 600. Speaker A provides him with an explanation of a situation where he has to do it. The similar form of two sentences which precedes and follows the sentence including '*say*' confirm the use of *say* as a hypothesizing tactic.

(11)

SPEAKER\_A: no i i understand that what if uh what if you think someone's trying to hurt them and you make a mistake SPEAKER\_B: thi[s]- this is where the question of gun control comes in what i consider gun control is being able to hit my target with the first shot SPEAKER\_A: yeah well uh that was the topic SPEAKER\_A: um-hum SPEAKER\_B: say a person uh s[tarts]- uh uh get all of a sudden my combat antenna goes up and say i've got the

vibes this guy's fixing to do something i go ahead and pull my piece

In (11), the interlocutors are talking about gun control. Speaker B supposes a situation where some person intends to hurt him, and in that situation he can pull his gun. Here, *say* is used as DM *say* signaling a supposition, which can be substituted with 'if' Here, *say* is used to assume a hypothetical situation. The part which immediately follows the DM *say* is a hypothetical situation and often a question follows the situation as Lee (2003) mentioned, though my data did not show any of those instances.

#### 4.1.5 DM *say* to serve as a self-repair

DM *say* can serve as a device of self-repair. The portion of the utterance which precedes the DM *say* is replaced with the part which follows. So here the DM *say* is a jointing device between two parts of an utterance and also functions as a time-filler to give the speaker time to think of a new word to use as a repair. The following is a clear example of self-correction.

(12)

SPEAKER\_B: um what did you do when you e[xercised]- when you did exercise regularly  
SPEAKER\_A: well i had a a little routine that i i did for uh warm ups and then i did some uh very  
SPEAKER\_B: uh-huh  
SPEAKER\_A: m[mild]- mild say light weight lifting

In the instance (12) the speaker B makes a self-repair on 'mild' by replacing it with 'light' DM *say* serves as a device signaling a self-repair.

(13)

SPEAKER\_B: oh my gosh  
SPEAKER\_B: yeah  
SPEAKER\_A: um and it was say you know we did a couple of different ones and it was the least expensive and

DM *say* in the example (13) occurs with self-repair. The sentence which started with 'it was' replaced with 'we did.' prefacing by DM *say*.

(14)

SPEAKER\_A: so uh and it starts uh anywhere from from five o'clock on  
SPEAKER\_B: well what about fast food what do you grab you know say

what's your favorite hamburger wendy's SPEAKER\_A: as far as burgers uh  
yeah i like wendy's

The question is replaced with the corrected question 'what's your favorite hamburger Wendy's' which is preceded by the DM *say*.

#### 4.1.6 DM *say* to signal topic shift

When there is a shift to a new topic or to a different aspect of a topic, the DM *say* is often used to indicate such transitions. DM *say* can be considered a signpost to inform a topic change.

(15)

SPEAKER\_A: why they don't talk about it i mean they don't bring it up at  
all why you would think they'd be real having a real campaign with one  
party or the other SPEAKER\_B: right yeah SPEAKER\_A: and they never talk  
about it they just keep doing it you know SPEAKER\_B: yeah that there's  
some kind of justification there and i don't know what it is SPEAKER\_B: and  
i don't know if i agree with it or yeah SPEAKER\_A: i- i just like to hear them  
talk about it you know i like to hear some of the congressmen or senators at  
least SPEAKER\_B: right SPEAKER\_A: say well let's let's bring this before  
let's examine every one of our foreign aids

SPEAKER\_B: right SPEAKER\_A: and look like like they did with the  
defense with the military bases they they investigated all those rightfully  
wrongly wrongfully whether which ones should be closed i don't know  
SPEAKER\_B: right SPEAKER\_A: at least they looked at it i think they  
should look at foreign aid and say hey which ones do we not need to give you  
know

In the example of (15), *say* is used to indicate a shift of topic. First they were complaining about congressmen and senators. The suggestion to change the topic to examine their foreign aids followed the DM *say*. Using the DM *say* yields a cohesive relation between utterances which have different topics by signaling the topic change before the new topic is abruptly introduced.

#### 4.1.7 DM *say* as utterance terminator device.

DM *say* functions to mark the utterance's closing by following a DM *say*. Speakers end a sentence with *say* to indicate or emphasize that they have made a point.

(16)

SPEAKER\_A: and started being bought out by families and things and she started having fewer and fewer friends  
SPEAKER\_B: uh-huh  
SPEAKER\_A: and people just sh[e]- sh[e]- sh[e]- she used to say to me wh[en]- at when she was ninety two or something at the time say  
SPEAKER\_B: oh my  
SPEAKER\_A: um you know i just i- all my friends have died off i have nothing to do i'm bored y[ou]- know i walk over to the store i walk back someone comes and picks me up and brings me to the community and so when she went to a nursing home

(17)

SPEAKER\_A: um yeah some stuff that you could call new age let's see i like uh cherry riley a lot  
SPEAKER\_B: um-hum  
SPEAKER\_B: um-hum  
SPEAKER\_B: i don't know who that is  
SPEAKER\_A: and okay uh let's see well who do you like from that category yeah say  
SPEAKER\_B: from new age well i was talking about like new wave or uh-huh um-hum

In both examples of (16) and (17), each end of speaker A's utterances, DM *say* is put to signal the termination of utterance.

#### 4.1.8 DM *say* to attract the hearer's attention

It can be observed that the DM *say* is used to attract the attention of the hearer whereby the speaker suggests that the information which he is going to offer is worth the hearer's attention. The DM *say* is usually in the initial part of the statement and draws the hearers' attention to the questions which follow. Some instances may have more specified functions such as an emphazier or a signal to express a personal feeling or attitude.

(18)

SPEAKER\_B: and i went to a vineyard or two in germany  
SPEAKER\_A: um that's neat  
SPEAKER\_B: yeah that was nice  
SPEAKER\_B: um  
SPEAKER\_B: hum  
SPEAKER\_B: but so um  
SPEAKER\_A: say what about have you ever

been to hawaii SPEAKER\_B: uh no i haven't have you SPEAKER\_A: no  
SPEAKER\_A: no

In (18), by using DM *say* the hearer's attention is attracted to the speaker A's question " what about have you ever been to Hawaii'

(19)

SPEAKER\_B: don't uh the lactose that kind of milk it doesn't our we we tend  
to uh what's it called we don't synthesize the the calcium the same way

SPEAKER\_A: uh-huh

SPEAKER\_A: we we throw more of it off our bod[y]- out other words

SPEAKER\_B: yeah we we slough some of it we we send we send some of  
it out because it our body doesn't accept some of it

SPEAKER\_A: um-humS

PEAKER\_B: so we're not utilizing we're when it when it gets rid of some of  
that um that we can't use it get rids it gets rid of some of the calcium

SPEAKER\_A: um-hum

SPEAKER\_B: whereas we eat say broccoli you utilize all of it you utili[ze]-  
your your body accepts all of the broccoli

The attention attracted by DM *say* emphasize the word 'broccoli' compared with milk.

(20)

SPEAKER\_A: you all have some pretty good cheese up there don't you

SPEAKER\_B: pardon me SPEAKER\_A: say y'all have a lot of good cheeses  
up there though

The speaker A's first utterance was not understood by speaker B. So speaker B asked speaker A to repeat it. Speaker A uses DM *say* to attract attention to his/her repeated utterance.

(21)

SPEAKER\_B: and she couldn't get out and her hair it was and she was heavy  
kind of like me and so what you could see was this big bottom sticking out  
of her of her dishwasher and her husband was SPEAKER\_A: uh-huh

SPEAKER\_B: say he was videotaping this thing you know there she is caught  
in the dishwasher you know oh it was hysterical and SPEAKER\_A: oh my

word

DM *say* can also represent a personal feeling such as an exclamatory surprise or pride or a personal attitude like agreement in spontaneous conversation. In the example above, the speaker's personal feelings and attitudes were focused on by using the DM *say*. In (20), *say* attracts the hearer's attention to the speaker B's surprise that the husband was videotaping when her wife's head was caught in the dishwasher.

In addition, four instances of *say* in the sentence final position were misspelling of 'per se' Mistaken instances of 'say'<sup>3)</sup>.

**TABLE 1**  
**The frequency of occurrence of DM *say*'s function**

Pragmatic Function	Total(N)	Percentage
1.approximator	41	31%
2.specification	7	5%
3. exemplification	43	33%
4.supposition	3	2%
5. self-repair	4	3%
6.topic shift	3	2%
7. utterance terminator	5	4%
8.attention getter	25	19%
Total	131	100%
DM <i>say</i> occurrences /total occurrences of 'say'	131//4103	33.32/100

3) **Mistaken instances of 'per say' in the Switchboard spoken corpus.** In both two example below, 'per say' is used meaning 'in itself' and mistaken spelling of 'per se'.

(25)

SPEAKER\_B: oh gosh that's that's the general you know y[ou]- you know you almost need to know the family situation you know and you know number of kids fortunately

SPEAKER\_B: i have two children and they're both grown and are covered you know under their own plans so i don't i don't have medical you know expenses for them per *say*

(27)

SPEAKER\_B: um did you ever get to watch any of the uh new orleans games

SPEAKER\_A: this SPEAKER\_A:ac[tually]- i i'd have to confess i don't really scope out the new orleans games per *say*

**FIGURE 1**  
The frequency of occurrence of DM *say*'s function

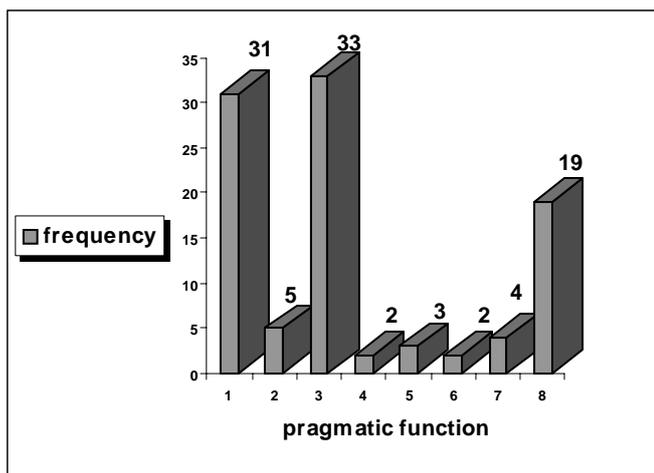


Table 1 demonstrates that DM *say* is used primarily as a signal for exemplification and an approximator, 33% and 31%, respectively, whereas the use of DM *say* as supposition and topic shift was very infrequent, showing only 2%. And 19 percent of DM *say* occurred as an attention getter. The use of DM *say* with specification and utterance terminator are rather infrequent. The total token of DM *say* is 131 among the total *say* occurrences, taking up 33.32 percent, which means *say* as a discourse marker could not be ignored both in usage and in teaching.

#### 4.2 The diachronic analysis of *say*

Based on the data of the Oxford English Dictionary, I attempted to account for the functions of *say* diachronically. Many functions within the five categories suggested in the analysis were shown in the following data.

##### 4.2.1 DM *say* to attract the hearer's attention.

Historically, the first function used was the attention attraction device.

(1)

1742 Gray *Eton* 21 *say*, father Thames! for thou hast seen Full many a sprightly race.

(2)

a1771 Gray *Amatory Lines* 7 Ah! *say*, Fellow-swains, how these symptoms befell me?

(3)

1896 A. E. Housman *Shropshire Lad* xxiv, *say*, lad, have you things to do?

In (1), *say* is used to attract the father Thames's attention prefixed to a statement. In (2), *say* is used to attract Fellow-swains' attention to an indirect question to declare or make known 'how these symptoms befell me. Also *say* is also used to express the speaker's personal feeling of sadness. In (3), *say* is also used to attract the hearer's attention to the question.

#### 4.2.2 DM *say* to suppose a hypothetical situation

(4)

1643 Trapp *Comm. Gen.* xlvi. 1 But *say* it had been out of his way.

DM *say* is used to introduce a clause with the sense of 'supposing the hypothetical situation of it being out of his way.'

(5)

1601 Shakes. *Twel. N.* i. iv. 23 *say* I do speake with her (my Lord) what then?

The DM *say* is used like the word 'if', supposing a situation 'if I speak with her', then what will happen? As in the previous analysis, after the hypothetical situation prefaced by the DM *say*, a question follows.

#### 4.2.3 DM *say* as an approximator.

(6)

1863 Kingsley in *Lett.* etc. (1877) II. 147 The wages of my people..average 11s. per week... Harvesting, *say* ? more.

(7)

1898 *Allbutt's Syst. Med.* V. 450 Equal volumes of, *say*, thirty and forty-fold diluted normal acid.

(8)

1966 *Listener* 15 Sept. 388/3 A production volume of *say*, 20,000 units a year.

(9)

1861 Dickens *Gt. Expect.* lii, Early in the week, or *say* Wednesday.

(10)

1938 W. Stevens *Connoisseur of Chaos in Parts of World*(1942) 49 An upper, particular bough in, *say*, Marchand.

In (6), (7) and (8), *DM say* is prefixed to designate numerical information such as quantity or date to mark it as approximate information. And in (9) and (10), *DM say* shows an approximation of the immediately following information.

#### 4.2.4 *DM say* to present the specification

(11)

1736 Butler *Anal.* i. iii. 66 Pleasure and Pain are indeed to a certain Degree, *say* to a very high Degree, distributed amongst us without any apparent Regard to the Merit or Demerit of Characters.

The part preceded by the *DM say*, 'to a certain degree,' is specified by the following part, 'a very high Degree.' In this instance the *DM say* signals the specified utterance.

#### 4.2.5 *DM say* to exemplification device

(12)

1937 'G. Orwell' *Road to Wigan Pier* vi. 100 If he were, *say*, an Indian or Japanese coolie, who can live on rice and onions, he wouldn't get fifteen shillings a week-he would be lucky if he got fifteen shillings a month.

(13)

1940 W. Faulkner *Hamlet* i. ii. 40 In Ratliff it was that hearty celibacy as of a lay brother in a twelfth-century monastery-a gardener, a pruner of vines, *say*.

In the subordinate clause of example 12), the *DM say* sign a exemplification of he as an Indian or Japanese coolie. In (13), in explaining

about the hearty celibacy, the speaker illustrated a gardener and pruner of vines as an example.

## 5. Pedagogical implication

One might say there is no need to even teach a discourse marker. And there might be no difficulty in communicating in English without using a discourse marker. However, as you already observed in table 1 in the analyses section, we notice that 30 % of *say* is used as a DM which might be considered to be very rarely used compared with other DM such as oh, well, I mean, etc. It means we should not ignore the importance of teaching discourse markers. Discourse markers would help learners to understand better the flow of conversation, to express oneself more naturally and smoothly and to provide helpful linguistic strategies.

Discourse markers could be taught through teacher-student mini role-play, students' role play and discussion activity. In the teacher-student role-play, first the teacher shows examples by creating situations; one using DM, the other without DM. For example, the teacher can make up a situation which forces the use of a targeted discourse marker such as asking several students to request a favor from the teacher. And then the teacher refuses with slightly abrupt answers lacking discourse markers or other delays. The second time, the teachers refuses with answers using discourse markers.

After a while, students have a discussion activity where the teacher solicits students' impression of the two sets of answers, including why the second version sounds better, and the purposes and functions of discourse marker. This process can be repeated using other discourse markers. When students acquire the functions of DM, they might be asked to have role play activity using DM. Other suggestions are production tasks which ask students to transform some typical artificial dialog sample from ESL texts by inserting DM's into the text to create more life-like and natural dialogue. Teachers also can benefit from using video, audio material.

## 6. Conclusion

In sum, this paper attempted to identify various functions of the DM *say* in terms of pragmatic functions: 8 functions by examining the data from Switchboard corpus and 5 functions from the Oxford English dictionary.

The pragmatic function of the DM *say*I identified in the synchronic analysis has 8 categories: approximator; a signal to present the specified information a signal for exemplifying supposing a hypothetical situation; a signal of self-repair; a signal of topic change; an utterance terminator device; and an attracting device.

The diachronic analysis showed that '*say*' has been used as a DM since 1742 and provided the chronicle order of DM *say*'s function. The difference between the two analyses' results revealed that the DM *say*'s function has changed slightly and become more specified.

It is worthwhile to explore '*say*', the lexical verb, as a discourse marker. The DM *say* has been shown to be used in many different functions in spoken discourse. Conclusions about the DM *say* functions drawn from this study need to be confirmed from further studies which utilize more natural data sources such as transcribed data with audio material which enables researcher to examine even the intonation and to interview the interlocutors. This is because discourse marker serves as a link between two interlocutor's context. The diachronic analysis shows some functions have been already used. However, the synchronic analysis is based on spoken data and the diachronic analysis is done on written data. For further study, both analyses based on written discourse data would yield more exact results. Furthermore, naturally collected corpus data would reflect more vividly the pragmatic function. There is a prejudice that the DM *say* is more frequently used by male speakers and in serious contexts such as political debates. So the different use of the DM *say* as regards to gender can be investigated in further study. Further study with an experiment where the effect of teaching a discourse marker would definitely help in teaching students discourse markers.

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