

## DISCOURSE MARKERS IN BAHASA INDONESIA: THE USE AND THE MEANING

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### Abstract

Bahasa Indonesia has a lot discourse markers. This paper tries to find the use and the meaning of discourse markers in Bahasa Indonesia which appear in the initial position. The data are gathered from the movie entitled “3 Dara”. The research employed Schiffrin’s theory in discourse markers: must be detachable, contextualization cues and multifunction. The findings show that the markers are mostly to emphasize the intention of the speakers. The markers exist to make the conversation go smoothly and naturally. Most of the discourse markers do not have semantic meaning but they have ‘meaning’ in the conversation especially in the intention of the speakers. Some are to emphasize the points that the speaker wants to, others are to make the conversation go smoothly, and some are to function as hedges. Those markers are important in the conversation despite of their meaning. Without markers, conversation will be dull and boring.

**Key words:** markers, pragmatic markers

### Introduction

Discourse markers are mostly used in the spoken conversation. Discourse markers are unique. They are considered “as the oil which helps us perform the complex task of spontaneous speech production and interaction smoothly and efficiently” (Crystal 1988). It is little bit arguable to define what the discourse markers are. They are multifunctional linguistic expressions and they are not considered as word class.

Discourse markers, as stated above, are not considered as word class. They seem unimportant but they are important even sometimes essential in the spoken communication. They are not needed in the written communication. However, they are needed very much in the spoken communication or conversation. Their presence can make the conversation smoothly go. How important are they is described by Svartvik (1980) as “if a foreign language learner says *five sheeps* or *he goed*, he can be corrected by practically every native speaker. If, on the other hand, he omits a *well*, the likely reaction will be that he is dogmatic, impolite, boring, awkward to talk to etc, but a native speaker cannot pinpoint an ‘error’.”

It is just difficult to say what is wrong with the conversation, but the interlocutors know that there is something wrong with one of the elements of the



conversation. A variety of terms are used to refer to these elements. Among them is discourse marker (e.g. Schiffrin 1987), pragmatic marker (e.g. Fraser 1996, Brinton 1996), discourse particle (e.g. Schourup 1985; Abraham 1991; Kroon 1995), pragmatic particle (e.g. Östman 1981), pragmatic expression (e.g. Erman 1987) or connective (Blakemore 1987, 1988). The diversity of the terms reflects how complex these elements are. They can be used in multiple functions in the conversation. This paper uses Discourse Markers, which is the same as Brinton's term Pragmatic Markers (Brinton, 1996). If this paper mentions Pragmatic Markers without explanation, the latter term is considered as Discourse Markers. So, this paper uses two terms, Discourse Markers and Pragmatic Markers, which are the same in everything except in the name of the term.

Among the many "domains" (Schiffrin 1987; 2006) that the Discourse Markers fulfill, there are "the sequential structure of the dialogue, the turn-taking system, speech management, interpersonal management, the topic structure, and participation frameworks" (Fischer 2006). Discourse Markers, then, call for further sub-classification, e.g. response signals, segmentation signals, hesitation markers, discourse connectives, evidential markers, conversational management markers, etc. (Diewald 2013; Fraser 2006). They can be, therefore, used as discourse connectors, turn-takers, confirmation-seekers, intimacy signals, topic switchers, hesitation markers, boundary markers, fillers, prompters, repair markers, attitude markers, and hedging devices (Jucker and Yiv, 1998).

In the jungle of the argumentation, Schiffrin (1987) presents a number of "tentative suggestions" for an expression to be used as a DM:

- a. "it has to be syntactically detachable from a sentence
- b. it has to be commonly used in initial position of an utterance
- c. it has to have a range of prosodic contours (e.g. tonic stress and followed by a pause, phonological reduction)
- d. it has to be able to operate at both local and global levels of discourse, and on different planes of discourse this means that it either has to have no meaning, a vague meaning, or to be reflexive (of the language, of the speaker)"

Brinton (2006) cited by Andersen proposes more-detailed characteristics of the Discourse Markers (which is Pragmatic Markers in his term) that Pragmatic Markers:

- constitute a heterogeneous set of forms which are difficult to place within a traditional word class (including items like *ah*, *actually*, *and*, *just*, *like*, *now*, *really*, *well*, *I mean*, *I think* and *you know*);
- are predominantly a feature of spoken rather than written discourse;
- are high-frequency items;
- are stylistically stigmatised and negatively evaluated;
- are short items and are often phonologically reduced;
- are considered to have little or no propositional meaning, or at least to be difficult to specify lexically;

- occur either outside the syntactic structure or loosely attached to it and have no clear grammatical function;
- are optional rather than obligatory features;
- may be multifunctional, operating on different levels (including textual and interpersonal levels).

Schiffrin tries to theorize the definition of markers. She says three things on the theorizing proposal. First, she specifies the conditions that allow a word to be used as a discourse marker: syntactically detachable, initial positions, range of prosodic contours, operate at both local and global levels, operate on different planes of discourse. Second, she suggests that discourse markers were comparable to indexicals, or, in a broader sociolinguistic framework, contextualization cues. And third, she proposes although markers have primary functions, their use is multifunctional (Schiffrin et.al. (ed), 2001).

Basically, “discourse markers usually short, phonologically reduced, and they are usually part of a separate tone group” (Urgelles-Coll, 2010). They are attached loosely in the sentence. They are not part of the sentence either. They can be omitted without changing the meaning semantically. Therefore, they are always given a comma in written text as the examples below (2010).

1. I will not join you tonight. I have a lot of housework. *Besides*, if I get drunk, I won't be able to go to work tomorrow.
2. He was really tired. *However*, the noise did not let him sleep.
3. That wasn't much fun. *Well*, it is over and done with.

Trillo (2006) states that there are three main approaches to the study of discourse markers: the conversational, the grammatico-syntactic, and the discourse cognitive. Discourse markers are well-understood in the field of conversation. They play more important role in the conversational rather than in the ideational matter. Schiffrin (1985: 281) says that discourse markers “help speakers express interactional alignments toward each other and enact conversational moves”. Schiffrin (1987) then adds that the presence of discourse markers in a conversation helps the mechanics of turn-taking, the organization of speech acts, the structuring discourse ideas, the interactive structure of participants, and the presentation of information.

The second model corresponds to the grammatico-syntactic approach to discourse markers. Knot and Dale (1994) cited by Trillo (2006) say that discourse markers enumerate coordinators, subordinators, conjunct adverbs, and phrases that take sentential complements.

The third model deals with the conversation discourse. The phenomenon of discourse markers shows that spoken interaction needs to have a pragmatic skeleton, consisting of such discourse slots, that holds the communicative force of the interaction together. The slots are filled by elements that may vary according to regional, ideolectal, or sociolinguistic features within one and the same language.

Bahasa Indonesia, spoken by Indonesians, as other languages, has discourse markers. These discourse markers appear in the conversation. This paper tries to find the discourse markers in Bahasa Indonesia and tries to explain the function of the discourse markers.

There are a lot of markers in Bahasa Indonesia, which are produced in the initial position, in the middle and in the final position. To limit the study, this paper focuses on the discourse markers which appear in the initial position.

### Method

Bahasa Indonesia does not have a published corpus of the spoken language. Therefore, it is common if there are different data when researchers conduct a research on the spoken language. They have to record by themselves since they cannot lay on the corpus. Therefore, the data of this research are gathered from the movie "3 Dara". The movie talks about three men who always underestimate women and by an accident are 'cursed' to be women. Those three men do all things to break the curse. In this condition, many discourse markers appear.

The data are then analyzed to find the function of those markers. The finding is, first, in the form of table to show the data of the markers; and second, it is in the form of elaboration about the function of the markers and the reason how such markers uttered.

### Discussion

There are some markers which are in the initial position. The most produced marker in the initial position is *eh*, or sometimes just *e*, either with lowering intonation or raising intonation. There are three ways to pronounce the markers. The first is [e], the second is [ə] and the last [æ]. They, those three pronunciations, function differently. They will also have different intention when the intonation is different.

1. **Eh...** Tif, nyokap kamu telpon nih. (Tif, your mom is calling you.)
2. **Eh..** mungkin ada yang mau pesen minum lagi?  
(Some of you might order another drink?)
3. **E...** maaf saya potong Mbak Windi.  
(Excuse me to interrupt Mbak Windi.)
4. **E** gue sudah kasih yang terbaik kok. Gua sudah kasih semuanya.  
(I have given her the best. I have also given her everything.)
5. **Eh...** kamu hari ini ngapain aja?  
(What did you do today?)
6. **Eh...** (rising intonation), mata sehat?  
(Your eyes are normal, aren't they?)

When it is pronounced [e] with plain intonation, like in sentence 3, it functions as time killer. It just gives the speaker time to think. In some occasion, it also functions as a turn taking, to show that this is his/her turn to talk, even though sometimes they give a pause before continuing their utterance. It also

functions as an attention getter as in sentence 1 and sentence 2. Sentence 5, with plain intonation, and ended with sound [h], functions as topic turn, to show that the topic changes. It is used to start a new topic.

However, when it is pronounced in rising intonation, as in sentence 6, it is to get very careful attention. Usually, when it is used in a very highly rising intonation, it is to get attention but in a rude way. It is used to challenge someone to have a quarrel.

In sentence 4, it is pronounced plainly with a pause, but very short. It is to correct the hearer about something he/she previously produced. The speaker tries to clarify the previous utterance produced by the first interlocutor that what the first interlocutor says is not correct. In this case, the speaker tries to emphasize that he has done anything, he has already given anything.

7. **Eh..eh...** Chad, Mas, gue cabut dulu ye.

In the case of sentence 7, the marker is pronounced two times. The speaker tries to get more intention from his friends. It is also to emphasize that he really needs attention from them.

Another marker is *nah*. Based on the data gathered, the marker *nah* functions as to emphasize the topic and also to emphasize the agreement.

8. **Nah...** yang ketiga Bricer.  
(The third is Bricer.)  
9. **Nah,** itu bener.  
(Yes, that's right.)

In sentence 8, the marker is to emphasize the topic. It is to show that the topic of the discussion changes. The marker is also to show that the following topic is as important and interesting as the previous. It is just like *last but not the least*. Meanwhile, sentence 9 the marker functions to emphasize the agreement. The speaker agrees to the previous speaker and says that what the previous speaker says is right.

10. **Ya,** menurutku, ban ya, ban aja. Nggak perlu yang kaya gini-gini itu.  
(Well, I think, if it is about a tyre, just the tyre. Not needed to add something like this)  
11. **Ya...** yang elu present itu beda sama yang kita present kemarin.  
(Well, what you presented this day is different from what you presented the other day.)  
12. **Ya,** beneranlah.  
(Yes, of course it is true.)

Some of the data says something different from what Wouk explored. This marker is not the shortened form of *iya* (yes). The function of this marker, and also others, is the same as what Wouk proposes. They exist to maintain the solidarity and intimacy among the interlocutors. Only sentence 12 is the shortened form of *iya*, which means yes, or to emphasize the truth. However, as

stated before, markers are dealing with the conversation, spoken communication. Therefore, intonation plays an important role in this case. And it is also dependent very much on the context of the conversation.

There are two interlocutors in the situation of sentence 10. The second interlocutor does not agree with the first interlocutor's idea. They are talking about how to make an advertisement of a tyre, which also explores the beauty of women. The second interlocutor does not agree with that idea. She says that if the advertisement is about the tyre, it should be exploring the essence of the tyre, not the women. It is not about a sensation, but an essence of a tyre. She starts her idea with *ya*, with a little bit long pause, and with a plain intonation. It functions as a filler, just like the word *well* in English. It gives time to the speaker to think, also to get attention from the hearer that she still takes her turn.

The similar situation occurs with sentence 11. The second interlocutor is little bit surprised by what the first interlocutor presents. He presents something different from what he presented the week before. He starts his comment by the marker *ya*, with a long pause, and rising intonation. There is a curious feeling in his intonation. This marker functions as an attention getter, to get the more attention from the hearer. He is showing his feeling that he is surprised with the different idea that the first interlocutor presents. The marker *ya* here, is to get first interlocutor's attention to know how upset he (the second interlocutor) is.

13. **Idihhh...** ini orangnya.  
(What? Is she the woman?)
14. **Idih...** udah ayo.  
(Oh, come on)

Marker *idih* is not a Bahasa Indonesia marker. It is a dialect, a Jakartanese dialect, Bahasa Indonesia which is used by Jakartans. In this context, sentence 13, it is to show the surprise. The speaker is in the lounge of a bar. He is waiting for the waitress. When the waitress comes and says whether he is ready to order or not, the speaker is surprised because the waitress' voice is not good. He has been waiting for a beautiful waitress, but the waitress who serves him is not as beautiful as he expects, moreover she has an ugly voice. He is surprised of the woman, and to show his surprise, he uses *idih*, with rising pitch and short pause. It is not only to show the surprise, but also to show underestimating feeling.

However, *idih* in sentence 14 is to emphasize that the speaker does not want to continue the conversation topic. He shows his disagreement about the topic and he wants to change the topic of the conversation. That is why he then asks his friends to go.

15. **Aduh...** entar dulu.  
(Hey, wait a second.)

In most conversation, the marker *aduh* is used to express shocked, surprised, or hurt feeling. In this case, the speaker expresses his surprise

because his friend wants to take his phone. He is busy playing the phone and does not know that his friend comes to him to take his phone. He is surprised and expresses his surprise by producing *aduh*. This marker is almost the same *hey* in English.

16. Pak, kita ngajuinnya 3 bulan. **Kok** ini cuman 2 bulan?  
(Sir, we ask for 3 months. Why is it only 2 months?)
17. **He..e... kok** Ibu, sih? Ibu nggak tahu apa-apa Kris.  
(Not mom. My mom doesn't know anything, Kris.)

*Kok*, in Bahasa Indonesia, is used as a marker to show unbelieving feeling, to show that something happens is not as they expect. It is also used to correct the previous action or conversation. Like in sentence 16, the speaker asks her boss to have 3 month days off but her boss just gives her 2 months off. She is surprised of unbelieving permission, not 3 months as she expects. She produces *kok* to show her surprise of unbelieving. She wants to correct the boss that she asks for 3 months off, not 2 months.

The similar situation also occurs in sentence 17. He is proposing his girlfriend. His girlfriend thinks that the idea to propose her comes from his mom. He corrects her idea by saying that his mom does not anything. He uses *kok* to correct it, to show the different idea.

18. **He...** sama satu lagi. Di sini ada artikel tentang kehamilan pertama.  
(Hey, one more thing. Here is an article about the first pregnancy.)
19. **Heh...** (lowering intonation)  
(Hey...)
20. Lu mau bikin malu kita, Jay? **Ha? Heh?** (raising intonation). Kenapa?  
(You want to embarrass us, Jay? Hey? Why?)

*He* can be said in different intonations and each intonation has different intention. When it is said in plain intonation as in sentence 18, it can function to add something or some idea. In that sentence, the speaker wants to add some information. In this case, it functions as attention getter, to get his hearer's attention since he has not finished with the thing.

However, when it is pronounced in lowering nasalized intonation, it sounds cynical as in sentence 19. The speaker underestimates the hearer and cynically mocks his hearer. Meanwhile, when it is uttered in rising intonation, it sounds intimidating as in sentence 20. The speaker intimidates the hearer that what the hearer did will embarrass them.

21. **Ah...** kamu yang minta ya?  
(You ask, won't you?)

In many cases, the marker *ah* is used to show an expression of surprise or pain. When someone gets hurt, he screams *ah* or *aduh*. In sentence 21, *ah* is used to persuade the hearer to do something as the speaker wants. He uses the

marker *ah* with lower and long intonation to show the intimacy and being spoiled. He wants the hearer to do something, that is asking.

### Conclusion

There are a lot of markers in Bahasa Indonesia. Some markers are in the initial position. Those markers, even they have the same spelling, can function differently. For example, *eh* which can be used as a signal to change the topic. However, when the intonation is different, the function and the intention in the conversation will also be different.

Markers seem unimportant. However, they play an important role in the conversation. Even they draw the color of the conversation. Without markers, conversation will be dull and boring. People will not be communicating lively. Mastering markers in the conversation might lead us to be an easily-understood speaker because markers can emphasize our intention.

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### Appendix

No.	Sentences (Initial)
1	<b>Nah...</b> yang ketiga Bricer.
2	Pak, kita ngajuinnya 3 bulan. <b>Kok</b> ini cuman 2 bulan.
3	<b>Eh...</b> Tif, nyokap kamu telpon nih.
4	<b>Idihhh...</b> ini orangnya.
5	<b>Eh..</b> mungkin ada yang mau pesen minum lagi?
6	<b>Ah...</b> kamu yang minta ya?
7	<b>Aduh...</b> entar dulu.
8	<b>Idih...</b> udah ayo.
9	<b>E...</b> maaf saya potong Mbak Windi.
10	<b>Eh..eh...</b> Chad, Mas, gue cabut dulu ye.
11	<b>E...</b> Pak Jay, Pak Bobby, kita pamit. Sampai jumpa di presentasi final.
12	<b>Masak</b> baru dipegang dikit aja, udah nangis.
13	<b>Ehmm....</b> enak banget. Resep baru?
14	<b>Eh...</b> kamu hari ini ngapain aja?
15	<b>Nah</b> , itu bener.
16	<b>Ya</b> , menurutku, ban ya, ban aja. Nggak perlu yang kaya gini-gini itu.
17	<b>He..e... kok</b> Ibu, sih? Ibu nggak tahu apa-apa Kris.
18	Lu mau bikin malu kita, Jay? <b>Ha? Heh?</b> (raising intonation). Kenapa?
19	<b>Ya...</b> yang elu present itu beda sama yang kita present kemarin.
20	<b>E...</b> gue sudah ngasih yang terbaik kok. Gua sudah ngasih semuanya.
21	<b>Heh...</b> (lowering intonation) --> sinis
22	<b>Ya</b> , beneranlah.
23	<b>He...</b> sama satu lagi. Di sini ada artikel tentang kehamilan pertama.
24	<b>Ah...</b> kamu yang minta ya?
25	<b>Eh...</b> (raising intonation), mata sehat?
26	<b>Eh.... tapi....</b> mungkin, masih memegang nomor telponnya?