

The Study on Metapragmatic Functions of the Discourse Marker So in Two Broke Girls

Ying Huang

Department of Foreign Language, Henan University of Science and Technology; Luoyang 471000, China

Abstract: The paper focuses on the conversations of American sitcom Two Broke Girls (Season 3) from the perspective of metapragmatics. It shows that discourse marker so plays 6 metapragmatic functions in the conversational interaction such as transition marker, turn-taking marker, inference marker, emotion marker, mitigation marker and contemplation marker.

Keywords: Discourse marker; Metapragmatics; Two Broke Girls

1. Introduction

The discourse markers have been used frequently in our daily communication. For example, people are used to using oh, you know, well when they communicate with others. Among the previous studies on discourse markers, we found that they paid less attention to one indispensable discourse marker so. Therefore, it is worth doing studies on the metapragmatic functions of discourse markers so in American sitcoms. Therefore, the paper attempts to analyze the different metapragmatic functions of discourse marker so in American sitcom Two Broke Girls (Season 3) with the support of metapragmatics.

2. Literature Review

Schiffrin^[1] defines discourse markers as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk”. Fraser^[2] continues the study on discourse markers from syntactic-pragmatic perspective and defines them as a class of lexical expressions which include conjunctions, prepositional phrases, adverbials and so on. Blakemore^[3] studies discourse markers from the cognition-pragmatic perspective with relevance theory that discourse markers indicate the optimal relevance between the proposition and interpretation. According to different scholars, discourse markers are divided into different classifications. In a word, discourse markers are linguistic forms which have no influence on truth condition of utterances and foster the communicative efficiency with different pragmatic functions. They indicate a relationship between the current utterance and the forthcoming contextual information or the later coming contextual information. What's more, they convey the speakers' attitude or emotion and provide contextual information to facilitate the listeners' understanding of certain utterances.

Metapragmatics can be defined as “the pragmatics of metacommunicative utterances in use”. According to Verschueren, metapragmatics involves the study of “the language users' reflexive awareness of what is involved in a usage event”, including the choices they have made in communication. Metapragmatic awareness means a kind of reflexive thinking in the process of language expression, which is often reflected in our language use. Language use is an adaptable and negotiable making of linguistic choices. Verschueren thinks that discourse marker is a linguistic way which indicates speakers' metapragmatic awareness. Although discourse marker has no influence on the meaning of utterances, it is usually used to indicate the coherent relationship between one discourse and the remaining context, express speakers' attitude towards propositional meaning, or explain the source of speaker's utterance.

3. Analysis of Discourse Marker So in Two Broke Girls

Two Broke Girls (Season 3) was shot in 2013 and the conversations usually happened in the small diner or pastry school. By depicting daily life of two girls named Max and Caroline, this sitcom shows us many native-English expressions which are helpful for us to understand and use.

3.1 Data collection and processing

The data are collected from the sitcom which consists of 24 episodes, the word so occurs 406 times in total. Among them, so plays semantic roles such as a degree word or fixed expression, expresses purpose or result and replaces what had been mentioned in the forgone content. These functions have been excluded from the following analysis. For example:

- (1) Max: I love my new phone! It's so cool and red. (Episode 2)
- (2) Caroline: I have to go to the restroom, Max. So do you. (Episode 17)

Table 3.1 Metapragmatic functions of discourse marker so in Two Broke Girls

Metapragmatic functions		Frequency		Percentage	
Text-oriented	Transition marker	134	44	74.44%	24.44%
	Turn-taking marker		35		19.44%
	Inference marker		46		25.56%
	Contemplation marker		9		5.00%
Emotion-oriented	Emotion marker	46	16	25.56%	8.89%
	Mitigation marker		30		16.67%
Total		180		100%	

3.2 Metapragmatic functions of so

Finding shows that so mainly reflects speaker's metapragmatic awareness about construction of discourse, expression of emotion and maintenance of interpersonal relationship. The specific metapragmatic functions of discourse marker so will be analyzed in the following parts with selected conversations.

3.2.1 So as a transition marker

It is known that discourse marker so could be used to initiate and continue a topic of conversation. When a speaker tries to get others' attention and initiate a topic to start a conversation, he might use so as the initiator with the guidance of metapragmatic awareness.

- (3) Caroline: I did it. I made a perfect cappuccino. 75% of my body is burned, but I did it. So how is it?

Max: We are so putting the small scrap nipple slap half half on the menu. (Episode 4)

Caroline learns how to use the coffee machine and finally make a cup of cappuccino, she wants to get attention and comment from Max and then she uses so to start the conversation. Actually, without using so, the core meaning of the question still works. But her metapragmatic awareness guides her to use so to emphasize the following utterance.

- (4) Caroline: I didn't get that, did you?

Max: Honestly, all I heard was group head.

Devon: So you tamp, pack, turn the knob, wait 3, blast for 30, then you pour the shot. Place the steam wand halfway in the pitcher at a 45°degree angle until the milk is 103 degrees. (Episode 4)

This conversation happens in a Starbucks Shop, in which Caroline and Max learn how to use the coffee machine. Devon is one of the clerks, he introduces the operations in such a fast speed that he is interrupted by Caroline and Max. He wants to emphasize what he just talked about and then he uses so as the marker to continue the discourse he didn't finish yet, which reflects his metapragmatic awareness that he needs to make the operations of coffee machine understood by the two girls.

3.2.2 So as a turn-taking marker

In daily communication, people may be interested in more than one topic. When they want to get more information about another topic or draw others' attention, they will use so as a turn-taking marker to imply their metapragmatic awareness.

- (5) Han: How come this isn't the "it" place?

Max: This isn't an "it" place. It's more of an "it" hole.

Han: Okay, so how do we become an "it" place? (Episode 8)

This conversation happens in the diner. Caroline says that she would have a date with a man in a more fashionable diner, and then Han asks why his diner is not fashionable. Max gives a humorous and ironic explanation to Han just like she usually does. Han doesn't want to hear the poignant comment of his diner but wants to get more information about how to improve his diner so he uses so as a turn-taking marker to change the topic. Han's metapragmatic awareness encourages him to change the current topic because he cares more about his diner, and discourse marker so plays that metapragmatic function.

3.2.3 So as an inference marker

People exchange information in communication. The hearer could infer the information from the speaker's utterances and

try to prove it with the use of so as a hint, which also make the discourse continue.

It is known that so always serves as a degree word to modify adjectives and adverbials. In daily communication, discourse marker so can also be used to express speaker's emotion and feeling such as anger, irony, excitement, surprise and impatience, etc., which reflects speaker's metapragmatic awareness directly.

3.2.4 So as a mitigation marker

In daily communication, the speaker is inclined to consider hearer's face. And so could serve as a mitigation marker for people to mitigate the force of face-threatening acts.

(9) Caroline: I feel like something's getting lost in the translation here, so let me be clear. It's over between us. (Episode 12)

Caroline says those utterances at the time while she is trying to break up with chef Nicholas. As we all know, Caroline comes from the higher social class with good education, her metapragmatic awareness forces her to protect Nicholas' face with tender expression. Discourse marker so moderates the power of utterances and mitigate the force of face-threatening acts, which could improve the communicative force and achieve intention.

4. Conclusion

This paper collects discourse marker so in *Two Broke Girls* (Season 3) and analyzes its different metapragmatic functions in some typical examples with the support of metapragmatics theory put forward by Verschueren. When people conceive metapragmatic awareness and utilize its regulation, they could use discourse marker appropriately to achieve the best communicative force in daily communication.

Discourse marker so plays a significant role in daily communication, its metapragmatic functions include constructing discourse, showing speaker's emotion, mitigating force of face-threatening acts, providing the time for speaker to contemplate and thus the hearer could infer the optimal relevant information from the context. On the grammarian aspect, so contributes to formation of linguistic sentence and serves as degree word or fixed expression. On the semantic aspect, so could be used to replace some semantic content to ensure the coherence and brevity of discourse. On the pragmatic aspect, so plays metapragmatic function in both text-oriented and emotion-oriented, which contributes to construction of discourse and keep interpersonal relationship. By and large, discourse marker is an indispensable linguistic method which aims to reflect speaker's metapragmatic awareness.

References

- [1] Schiffrin, D. *Discourse Markers*[M]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- [2] Fraser, B. What are discourse markers? [J]. *Journal of pragmatics*, 1999, (31): 931-952.
- [3] Blakemore, D. L. *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning: the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse Markers*[M]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Author: Ying Huang(2000-), postgraduate, comes from Anqing city, Anhui province and studies on pragmatics.