
The Meaning of Discourse Markers in Classroom Interaction

Maria Christodoulidou

Frederick University
pre.mc@frederick.ac.cy

Abstract

There hasn't been much research carried out to date relating the spoken classroom discourse and the correlation between meaning and interaction. In this study, I will explore the relationship between meaning and interaction as enacted by the Greek particles *lipon* ("so") and *endaksi* ("ok"), and, in particular, I will investigate their use within classroom interaction using the tools of the conversation analytic tradition. This study investigates these lexical particles within classroom interaction in pre-primary and primary classes in schools of Nicosia. For the investigation I recorded and transcribed 20 hours of classroom interaction. The lexical items under study fit into the category of what has traditionally been framed as discourse markers. In this study I centre my attention on the classroom genre and analyze the communicative purpose of the aforementioned discourse markers in the speech of the teachers.

1. Introduction

As the main medium of instruction, classroom genres have aroused the interest of researchers. To date, most studies of classroom language have shown that classroom conversations led by the teacher and involving the whole class typically have large structural junctures that delimit lessons and tasks, and phases within them (e.g., Bellack et al., 1966; Erickson 1978; Mehan 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard 1975).

Recent studies have explored a variety of discourse markers in a number of settings, but pre-primary and primary classrooms have been largely overlooked. The main purpose of this study is to analyse the occurrence of two lexical markers, that is, *lipon* ("so", "well") and *endaksi?* (ok?) in the speech of teachers in pre-primary and primary classrooms in Cyprus. The method that is adopted in the analysis of the data is Conversation Analysis (CA), which has its origins in the pioneering work of Sacks (1992a, 1992b).



The lexical items under study could fit into the category of what has traditionally been framed as discourse markers (DMs). According to Schiffrin (1987: 31), DMs are “textual coordinates of talk that bracket units of it”. Examples of discourse markers include the particles “oh”, “well”, “now”, “then”, “you know”, and “I mean”, and the connectives “so”, “because”, “and”, “but”, and “or”.

DMs have attracted a lot of research, both in papers and in book-length studies. Some studies deal with a whole range of discourse markers (Schourup 1982, Schiffrin 1987, Watts 1989), while others concentrate on individual ones (Lakoff 1973, Svartvik 1980, Schiffrin 1985 etc.). Most available classifications of DMs are based on their core meaning as separate lexical items and/or their functions in discourse coherence. For instance, Schiffrin (1985) examines the functions of DMs in terms of conversational coherence. Blackmore, who works within the framework of relevance theory suggests mainly four ways of classifying discourse connectives: (1) Discourse connectives introducing contextual implications (e.g., so, too, also); (2) Discourse connective concerned with strengthening (e.g., after all, moreover, furthermore); (3) Discourse connective introducing denial (e.g., however, still, nevertheless, but); (4) Discourse connective indicating the role of the utterance in the discourse in which it occurs (e.g., anyway, incidentally, by the way, finally).

Brinton (1996) shows that discourse markers also serve pragmatic functions and can be termed pragmatic markers, used by a speaker to comment on the state of understanding of information about to be expressed (with phrases such as ‘like’, ‘you know’); they may also be used to express a change of state (oh; Heritage 1984) or for subtle commentary by the speaker suggesting that “what seems to be the most relevant context is not appropriate” (well; Jucker 1993:438). These lexical items used in this manner are devoid of semantic content in and of themselves (Östman 1982; Schiffrin 1986; Vincent & Sankoff 1992) and are dependent on the local context and sequence of talk for their interpretation. To this direction an important study is Clift’s (2001) investigation of the particle ‘actually’ in interaction, because it shifts the focus from studies on the functions of DMs to investigation of the meaning of the specific particle in a range of interactional contexts.

Scarce research relating the spoken classroom discourse and the use of discourse markers using Greek data has been carried out to date. For instance, Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1998) and Archakis (2001) investigate conjunctions versus discourse markers based on Greek data. Archakis (2002) examines the discourse marker *diladi* (‘that is’) in classroom interaction. In Christodoulidou (2011) we centre our attention on the lecture genre and we analyze the communicative purpose of *lipon* (‘well’), *ara* (‘so’), *orea* (‘fine’) within spoken academic discourse.

The term ‘discourse markers’ is used only provisionally in this study, because the aim is to uncover the meaning and use of these lexical items based on the

position of the specific lexical items within the sequence and the composition of the turn in which they occur, in order to unravel their use in context. Drew and Holt's (1998: 497) observation below sheds light on the study of language use in proposing that the study of the components of a turn's should be analyzed by taking into consideration their place in the sequence and the construction of the turn.

The components of a turn's construction—at whatever level of linguistic production—are connected with the activity which the turn is being designed to perform in the unfolding interactional sequence of which it is a part, and to the further development of which it contributes.

2. Data and Methodology

The extracts included in this article comprise transcriptions of approximately 20 hours of video-recorded classroom interaction in pre-primary and first and second year primary classes in schools at Nicosia, Cyprus. The DMs under study are examined in the speech of the teachers during the Greek language course in the first and second year primary classes and during the fairytale hour in the pre-primary classes. The language spoken during the recorded classroom interactions involves a combination of Cypriot Dialect and Modern Greek.¹

All names of participants are replaced by pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy. For the transcription and analysis of the data we adopted the analytical tools of Conversation Analysis.

The transcription symbols used in this study —cited in Appendix I— are based on the transcription conventions developed by Jefferson for the analysis of conversational turns in Anglo-American conversation (cf. Sacks, Schegloff and

1 The Cypriot Greek dialect spoken in Cyprus is an indigenous variety of Greek. Cypriot Greeks are bilingual in the Cypriot dialect and Modern Greek. The Cypriot Greek dialect is acquired naturally while Modern Greek is taught as the standard language (cf. Ferguson, 1959: 30). In recent years researchers like Davy, Panyiotou and Ioannou, (1996), Papapavlou and Pavlou (1998) and Karyolemou and Pavlou (2001) have classified village Cypriot as the basilect and town Cypriot as the acrolect of the low variety. In addition, researchers like Karyolemou (1997; 2000), Moschonas (2002: 917), Terkourafi (2004) and Arvaniti (2002) have supported the creation of a Cypriot koine in urban centres, that is, a middle variety which is different from the local vernaculars incorporating important influences from Modern Greek.

Jefferson 1974). The transcription system is intended to capture in detail the characteristics “of the sequencing of turns, including gaps, pauses and overlaps; and the element of speech delivery such as audible breath and laughter, stress, enunciation, intonation and pitch” (Hutchby and Drew 1995: 182). Significant turns for the analysis are marked with arrows.

A powerful agenda for the analysis of talk-in-interaction is Schegloff, Ochs and Thompson’s (1996) proposal that the study of linguistic structures could be richly informed by consideration of their place in the wider context of social interaction:

The meaning of any single grammatical construction is interactionally contingent, built over interactional time in accordance with interactional actualities. Meaning lies not with the speaker nor the addressee nor the utterance alone . . . but rather with the interactional past, current and projected next moment.

(Schegloff et al. 1996: 40)

Sacks et al. identified components of the turn—the turn-constructive units (henceforth TCUs; Sacks et al. 1974: 702–4)—as sentential, clausal, phrasal, and lexical units, which can constitute complete turns. On their potential completion, transition to another speaker turns out to be relevant. The turn is seen as “the habitat in which turn constructive units –henceforth TCUs– are housed” (Schegloff 1996: 56) and this reframing deepens our understanding of turns-at-talk. Schegloff et al. claim that “an important dimension of linguistic structures is their moment-by-moment evolving interactional production” (Schegloff et al. 1996:39). The shift of focus from sentences to turn constructive units proposed by Schegloff et al. (1996) proves to be essential for this study.

In what follows I explore the theoretical and methodological implications of this claim by taking the turn and its component TCUs as the frame of reference in examining the two lexical items under study (*lipon, endaksi*) in classroom interaction. The DMs under study will be left untranslated within the extracts in order to uncover their interactional meaning based on their sequential order within the conversational extracts.

3. *Lipon* and *Endaksi*

According to the Greek-English dictionary of Stavropoulos (1988: 119) *lipon* can be (a) a deductive conjunction translated as “so”, “then”, “therefore”, “consequently”, “hence” or (b) an interjection which is translated as “so”, “well”, “then”, “now” for the expression of surprise, relief, query, decision etc. The

questioning *endaksi* is an adverb used to confirm agreement and is translated as “ok?” or “all right?” (Babiniotis 1998: 622; Stavropoulos 1988: 295). As will be shown in sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 in the extracts under study *lipon*:

1. occurs in the speech of the teacher to provide students with directions. Within the same turn, *endaksi?* occurs in final position to invite students’ agreement (cf. Pomerantz 1984).
2. occurs to signal return to a cut-off narration or discussion and
3. can occur to initiate inductive reasoning.

3.1. Lipon - Direction Giving - Endaksi?

In the extracts that follow the discourse markers *lipon* and *endaksi?* frame (cf. Goffman, 1974; 1979) a segment of the teacher’s speech in which she is instructing the students to follow specific directions. Generally *lipon* signals initiation of a new topic. As was shown in Christodoulidou (2011) in the sequential environment of lecture, *lipon*-prefaced turns are deployed by the lecturer in order to capture the students’ attention, signal the initiation of the lesson, and the termination of any other interaction among the students. In the data from pre-primary and primary classes, analyzed here, *lipon* introduces direction giving by the teacher to the students. The giving of directions is followed by questioning *endaksi?* with which the teacher seeks to confirm agreement by the students.

Extract 1

(T: Teacher; M: Marilena; N: Nicolas; S: Stefani; G: Giorgos. The conversation takes place after the teacher has finished reading a text-poem about weekdays.)

1. M En polla astio::
It’s very fu::nny.
2. T l::ne astio. Pco su fanice astio?
It i::s funny. What sounds funny to you?
3. M I Def – Tri::ti.
Mond- Tue::sday.
4. T I TRITI. Jati:: su fanice astia I Triti?
TUESDAY. Why:: does Tuesday sounds funny?
5. M E::mm epiðu::,
E::mm because::,
6. T epiði? ti θa kani::?
because? what will he do::?
7. M θa psaksi,
he will search,

8. T → θa psaksi mes to spiti:: Lipo::n (.) akuste me ti θelo na
he will search in the hou::se. Lipo::n (.) listen what I want you to
9. kanete. θa sas đoso đio tria lepta cero:: na to đjavasete po::li:
do. I'll give you two three minutes to read ve::ry::
10. prosektika, °o kaθenas° (.) monos tu °siya ° siya, siya::, mesa sto
carefully,°each one° (.) alone °slowly° slowly, slowly:: in your
11. mjaluđaci tu CE:: meta:: ean kati đen katalavenete::,
head A::ND the::n if there is something you don't understa::nd,
12. θa:: to ° simiosete°, θa °prospaθisete ° na to đjavasete prosextika ce
you'll ° take a note°, you'll °try° to read it carefully and
13. → meta θa to sizitisume eđo oli mazi:: Endaksi::?
then we'll discuss it here all together. Endaksi::?
14. M [NE::
[YE::S.
15. N [NE::
[YE::S.
16. S [NE.
[YES.

In extract 1 after the teacher has finished reading the text of the day, one of the students, M (1:1) proffers an appreciation, which triggers a discussion (1:1-7). The teacher (1:8-9) with *lipon* shifts the topic by initiating a request of the students attention: *Lipo::n (.) listen what I want you to do*. The request of their attention is followed in turns 9-13 by directions given to the student on how to proceed to second reading of the text. With the questioning *endaksi* that follows the teacher seeks to secure students' agreement.

Extract 2

(T: Teacher; M: Maria. Eleni is a university student, observer of the class.)

1. T I Eleni ine fiti::tria sto panepistimio >ce irθe eđo na parakoluθisi pu θa
Eleni is a stu::dent at university >and she came to watch
2. → kanume to maθima mas, to paramiθi mas<. Lipon kaθiste anapaftika::,
our course, our fairytale<. Lipon sit comfortably::,
3. fronima:: na akusetē to paramiθi mas ce na to akusi ce mazi mas ce I
quietly:: to listen our fairytale and with us will listen
4. → ciria Eleni, endaksi::?
mrs Eleni, endaksi::?
5. M enna mas to pi i ciria Eleni?
Is mrs Eleni going to read it to us?
6. T oçi eyo enna sa to po to paramiθi
no I'll read the fairytale.

In extract 2, after the information the teacher provides the students with, with *lipon* she shifts the topic by commanding the students to *sit comfortably*;; *quietly*;; *to listen our fairytale and with us will listen mrs Eleni, endaksi*;;? The questioning *endaksi* is deployed to secure the students' agreement.

3.2. Lipon + Return to the Cut-Off Narration

In the extracts presented in this section the discourse marker *lipon* is deployed after an interruption or parenthetical discussion to the ongoing reading or narration of a fairytale. The use of *lipon* in turn-initial position is recurrently deployed to mark return to the narration that was in progress before the interruption.

Extract 3

(T= Teacher; A= Assistant; C= Christos; S= Stavros. The teacher is reading a fairytale.)

1. T I meres pernou::san ce I mama γlari::na ekleje epiði
The days were pa::ssing and mom gu::ll was crying because
2. to micro γlaraci tis ðen ine san ta alla. Kati sinevene.
her little gull was different from the others. Something was wrong.
3. ((two children are pushing each other))
4. A ta çerja ðen ta exume ja na ðernume alla ja na aŋgalazume, a:::: ciria
hands are not for hitting but for hugging, o::h mrs
5. prepi na to pis ce si sta peðaca su oti ta çerja ta exume ja na xaiðevume
you have to say this to your kids too, that hands are for caressing
6. oçi ja na ðernume.
not for hitting.
7. C eyo piti mu epezame me to aðerfo mu alla en ton eðera.
at home we were playing with my brother but I didn't bit him.
8. T → LIPO::N, jenniθtce to mikro::=
LIPO::N, was born the little::=
9. S =γlaraci
=gull
10. T I mama γlarina ce o mpampas γlaros pos eπoθan?
how did mom gull and dad gull feel?

In extract 3 while the teacher is reading a fairytale (3: 1-2) she is interrupted by two children pushing each other (3: 3). The assistant (3: 4-6) addresses them with a reprehension. The teacher (3: 8) with the deployment of a loud LIPO::N shifts the footing from the interruption to the activity of reading the fairytale that was in progress as shown by the continuation of the narration in 3:8 *LIPO::N, was born the little*;;.

Extract 4

(T= Teacher; M= Michalis. The teacher is reading the fairytale)

1. T ðen mporou::se na peta::ksi to mikro:: ylara::ci ce kaθotane panta pano
the little gull couldn't fly:: and was always sitting on
2. se mia ksilini apovaθra::: Kserete ti ine I apova::θra:: mora?
a wooden do::ck. Do you know what a do::ck is kids?
3. M Ne
Yes
4. T ore::a. mono o Mixalis kseri ti ine I apova::θra::?
Goo::d. only Michalis knows what a do::ck is? ((the teacher shows a picture of a dock)).
5. → lipon ekaθotan panta eki pano stin apovaθra ci evlepe ta alla
lipon it was sitting always on the dock and was watching the other
6. ylارaca na maθenun na petane.
little gulls learning how to fly.

In extract 4: 2 the teacher cuts off reading to make a clarifying question: *Do you know what a do::ck is kids?* The second pair part to the question comes with a student's response in turn 3. After the teacher shows a picture of the dock (4: 4) she shifts the footing with the deployment of *lipon* which frames what follows as a continuation of the reading that was in progress before the parenthetical clarifying question.

3.3. Lipon + Inductive Reasoning

In this section *lipon* occurs late in the speech of the teacher in non turn-initial position and in non TCU initial position. Specifically, *lipon* is deployed by the teacher as a deductive conjunction to the inductive reasoning expressed by the teacher and leads the sequence to closure.

Extract 5

1. T lei ce me sinefça::: ekso I kakocefça:::
It says even with cloudiness kakocefça² goes out.

² *Kakocefça* does not have an exact translation in English. It could be translated as 'sadness'. It will be left untranslated because the conversation is about the etymology and meaning of the word.

2. N ti ennoi ðame?
what does it mean here?
3. T ti ine i kakocefça araje::? Ja sceftite li::yo:: ti leksula ka:ko:cefça::
what is kakocefça I wonde::r? Thi::nk of the word ka:ko:cefça::
4. ((she writes the word on the board.))
5. N kaka [ce cefça
bad [and cefça
6. E [kako:
[ba::d
7. T INE- >ðe milame oli mazi< sosta to skeftomaste, ine
IT'S- >we don't talk all together< we're thinking correctly, it
8. apo to kako:: to cefi. Kserete ti simeni exo
comes from ba::d cefi³. Do you know what's the meaning of I have
9. → cefi::? (.) Ime (.) xaru::menos. Eðo lipon kakocefça vjeni apo
cefi::? (.) I'm huppy. Here lipon kakocefça comes from
10. to kako CEFI. Ðilaði:: ðen i::me xarumenos..
bad CEFI. That i::s I'm no::t huppy.

In extract the word *kakocefça* (5:1) triggers a discussion around its meaning in 5: 3. The teacher first explains the meaning of *exo cefi* as *I'm huppy* in 5:9. *Lipon* occurs in non turn-initial position and in non TCU initial position as a deductive conjunction to extract the meaning of *kako cefi* through inductive reasoning: If *exo cefi* means *I'm huppy*, *kako cefi* means *I'm not huppy*.

Extract 6

(Before this extract the teacher gives to students words which include diphthongs and they try to categorize them based on orthography.)

1. T PEÐJA EA::N o ka::θenas-, akuste me liyo:: oli::, afiste
CHILDREN I::F each of you- listen to me a little:: a::ll, let
2. ta molivja kato c' akuste me, EAN o kaθenas apo esa::s (.) kani fasaria
your pencils down and listen to me, IF each of you:: (.) makes noise
3. I me tin tsantula tu I pano stin karekla I milai ce
either with his bag or on the chair or if he/she's talking and
4. mu::rmu::ri::zi::, peta::jete opote nane, ÐEN mpo::run ta peðja na
mu::rmu::ri::ng, po::ps up anytime, children caNNO::T
5. ksexorisune ce n' akusune. Ine po::li:: li- poli:: leпти ðiafora.
hear the difference. It's a ve::ry:: sl- very:: slight difference.

³ *Cefi*: mirth, good mood

6. *Prepi*: na kanume apoliti isiċia ja na katalavenun ta alla peđaca ce l
We need to be absolutely quiet for the other kids and our
7. *simmaθites mas an ine a:f i a:v. EA::N o kaθenas*
schoolmates to hear the difference between a:f or a:v. l::F each
8. *kani ena fillo ġtsi:: l to moli::vi tu l to svisti::ri tu::,*
one makes a page like thi::s or his pensi::l or hi::s ru::bbe::r,
9. *ta pođara::ca tu l tin karekla tu, jinete polli fasaria o:::: mes tin*
his fee::t or his chair, it's a lot of noise o:::: in the
10. → *taksi o:::: θa sas parakale::so:: lipon na iste apO::lita omos isiċi,*
classroom o::::. I will lipon a::sk you to be absO::lutely quiet,
11. *to::so:: pu otan θa rikso tin karfitsa mu n' akusti::. Ja na*
so:: mu::ch that if I throw my pin to hea::r it. Because we need to
12. → *katalavenu me an tixon kanun ta peđja laθoċ. Endaksi? Mu ġinete to*
understand if the children make a mistake. Endaksi? Do you give
13. *loġo sas oti θa prospaθisete OLLi::?*
me your word that you'll A::LL try?
14. P NE::
YE::S

In extract 6 *lipon* occurs after a long reprehension of the teacher to the students. It occurs as a part of the final request of the teacher to the students to be quiet. The request is presented as warranted based on the reasons exposed by the teacher about what happens when students make noise in the classroom. *Lipon* (6: 10) occurs in non turn-initial position and also in non TCU initial position as a deductive conjunction of the teacher's inductive reasoning. With *endaksi?* (6: 12) expressing request for acceptance, followed with a second request for commitment: *Do you give me your word that you'll A::LL try?* (6: 12-13), the teacher invites for agreement and leads the sequence to closure.

4. Conclusion

This article presents the use of the discourse markers *lipon* and *endaksi* in classroom interaction. In the data *lipon* and *endaksi* are used in specific sequential positions within the wider interactional context and they occupy specific positions within the construction of the turn where they occur. Hence their position within the sequence as well as their position in the turn and composition of the turn –that is their relationship with the other elements of the turn, whether they proceed or follow them, whether they are freestanding, or parts of a TCU– enabled us to unfold their meaning within lecture interaction. A simple schematic representation of the position that the lexical items under study take in the turn and the actions they accomplish as revealed in the data might look like Table 1.

Table 1.

The position and composition of the DMs and the activities accomplished.

DMs	Composition of the turn	Activity
Lipon	Non turn-initial TCU initial	Giving directions at the beginning of the lesson
	Turn-initial TCU initial	Signal return to a cut-off narration or discussion
	Non turn initial Non TCU-initial	Inductive reasoning
Endaksi	Turn final position Freestanding TCU	Asking for agreement

As was shown in the data *lipon* signals direction giving by the teacher to the students at the beginning of a new activity. It is followed by questioning *endaksi?* in turn final position seeking to secure student's agreement. *Lipon* can also occur to signal return to the narration that was in progress before an interruption has taken place. A third use of *lipon* is its occurrence in the middle of the turn as a deductive conjunction as part of an inductive reasoning.

Methodologically, the findings presented here underscore the importance of examining discourse markers within interactional sequences as well as within institutional discourse such as classroom interaction as examined here. Analyzing some of the uses of these DMs within the classroom discourse, the current study has revealed that the placement of each lexical particle in the turn and its component TCUs is highly consequential for the activities being undertaken in the sequence to which its turn belongs. Its placement not only characterizes as a particular type of activity—topic introducing, say, or implicative—the turn which contains it but also the turn to which it is responsive. To conclude with, the use of discourse marker has a significant role to play in the structure and coherence of classroom discourse and thus it should be further examined by focusing on the relationship between meaning and interaction.

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Appendix

Transcription Conventions

[Separate left square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers,
[indicates a point of overlap onset, whether at the start of an utterance or later.
[[Double separate left square brackets, distinguish pairs of
[[overlapped utterances.
=	Equal signs ordinarily come in pairs – one at the end of a line and another at the start of a next line. If the two lines connected by the equal signs are by the same speaker, then there was a single, continuous utterance with no break or pause, which was broken up in order to accommodate the placement of overlapping talk. If the lines connected by two equal signs are by different speakers, then the second followed the first with no discernible silence between them.
(2)	Numbers in parenthesis indicate silence.
(.)	A dot in parentheses indicates a micropause.
.	The period indicates a falling or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence.
?	A question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
,	A comma indicates continuing intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary.
::	Colons are used to indicate the prolongation or stretching of the sound just preceding them. The more colons the longer the stretching.
-	A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption, often done with a glottal or dental stop.
<u>word</u>	Underlining is used to indicate stress or emphasis.
WOrd	Capital letters indicate louder than the rest talk.
° °	Two degree signs indicate that the talk between them is markedly softer than the talk around it.
↑	The up arrow indicate a segment starting on sharper rise.
> <	The combination of "more than" and "less than" symbols indicates that the talk between them is compressed or rushed.
.hhh	The dot followed by "h's" indicates inbreath