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Discourse coherence and intersubjectivity: The development of final *but* in dialogues

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ABSTRACT

All the studies on final particles in non-Asian languages systematically propose a synchronic view of the constructions under consideration. This paper closes the gap by offering a diachronic analysis of final *but* in dialogues in a corpus of Northern English over a sixty-year period. Relying on Schiffrrin's (1987) planes of discourse and Hasselgård's (2006) definition of a modal particle, it is shown that final *but* has semantic–pragmatic properties of both a discourse marker and a modal particle. A socio-linguistic approach complements the analysis. Besides, the modal values identified are discussed in relation to Traugott's (1982) and Traugott and Dasher's (2002) theories of language change. Finally, it is explained how final *but* can be inserted in the category of final particles.

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1. Introduction

Language change is diachronically viewed as change in use and speakers as actively participating in the process. Even though morphosyntax is said to be responsible most of the time for new linguistic expressions, it has recently been possible to identify the emergence of new syntactic constructions in the context of dialogic contexts, as elaborated by Schwenter (2000), Waltereit (2006), or more recently by Haselow (2014) and Hancil (2016). This work stands in this tradition and proposes how grammar, diachrony and dialogicity interact, thereby echoing the introduction to a collection of synchronic studies entitled *Interaction and Grammar* (Ochs et al., 1996), in which Schegloff, Ochs & Thompson firmly postulated that linguistic structures could be better analysed if they were placed in the wider context of social interaction.

Final particles are typically used in dialogues. There has recently been a growing interest in final particles from a synchronic point of view in non-Asian languages (see, f.i., Hancil et al., 2015) but no diachronic analysis has been pursued in these languages so far. It was shown in a synchronic study of final *but* (Hancil, 2014) that the highest figures (1.60% of the total of *buts* in NECTE) were identified in the north of Britain. So it was decided to work with a diachronic corpus of Northern English. The purpose of this paper is to close the gap and provide a diachronic investigation of the final particle *but* in a Northern English variety, Newcastle English, using data from the *Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* (DECTE) extending over 50 years (1960–2010), as illustrated in (1):

- (1) A: Was that the other night
B: Ehm what day is it
A: It would have

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- B: Friday
 A: It would have been not last night **but**
 B: Wednesday
 A: Yeah she said that she saw him
 B: Yeah
 A: Because I was out with her last night
 B: Because he rang up
 (DECTE)

After presenting the previous literature (Section 2) and the data (Section 3), I will study the overall distribution (Section 4) and analyze a few examples (Section 5) to show that final *but* displays semantic–pragmatic properties of both a discourse marker and a modal particle, relying on Schifffrin's (1987) planes of discourse structure and Hasselgård's (2006) definition respectively. Furthermore, I will provide a socio-linguistic analysis of the historical data (Section 6). Besides, I will offer an explanation of the development of the modal values based on Traugott's (1982) and Traugott and Dasher's (2002) theories of language change (Section 7). Finally, I will try to understand how final *but* can be defined as belonging to the category of final particles (Section 8). Section 9 summarizes the results and opens up new perspectives.

2. Previous literature

The phenomenon of final particles has been relatively understudied in European languages. In English, it is the final particle *but* that has attracted the attention of researchers such as Mulder and Thompson (2008) and Mulder et al. (2009) in American and Australian English. Only Hancil (2014, 2015, 2016) has focused her attention on British English. The presence of discourse markers in final position is attested in Northern Englishes, as confirmed by Trudgill (2004) and Clarke (2010), or more recently by Beal et al. (2012):

Sentence-final *but*, as in *I don't like it but*, is well known in colloquial Australian English. It does not occur in England, except in Tyneside, but is common in Ireland and Scotland.

(Trudgill 2004:19)

Sentence-final *but* has been linked to British (particularly northern), Scottish, Irish and Australian English.

(Clarke 2010: 153)

There are a number of sentence-final features that are characteristic of North-Eastern dialects. *But*, for example, may be used in sentence-final position to mean 'though' (e.g. *I'll manage but*), in addition to its standard usage as a conjunction. Such use of *but* has been attested not only in Tyneside but also in Wearside.

(Beal et al., 2012: 92)

Relying on conversation-based corpora of American English and Australian English, Mulder and Thompson (2008: 180) study the behaviour of final *but* and argue for the grammaticalization cline in (2):

- (2) Initial *but* > Janus-faced *but* > final *but*
 IU-initial conjunction IU-final discourse particle

Mulder and Thompson (2008: 195) distinguish six stages on the grammaticalization pathway, which are syntactically described as in (3a–f), respectively. Square brackets indicate an intonation unit, and X and Y semantically conflict each other through a contrast or concessive relationship. The initial and Janus 1 *buts* begin, but the others end, an intonation unit.

- (3) a. Initial: X [but Y]
 b. Janus 1: X [but,] Y
 c. Janus 2: [X but]
 d. Final 1 (final hanging): [X but]
 e. Indeterminate: [X/Y but]
 f. Final 2 (final particle): [Y but]

Janus *buts* are “between” the initial and final *buts*, and are called “Janus” because they have properties of both “initial” and final *buts*, and can be interpreted as either.

Mulder and Thompson (2008) show that *but* follows a grammaticalization pathway that starts as an “initial *but*”, as illustrated in (4a), and becomes “Janus-faced *but*” as exemplified in (4b–c) to “final *but*” as shown in (4d–f).

- (4) a. So he got another radio this summer, but of course that got ripped off also. (Initial)
 b. I don't know what the real story is, but,... it sounded kinda neat. (Janus 1)

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