

## Analysis of Discourse Markers: between the Semantic Stability and the Contextual Variability

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### Abstract

In this paper we want to argue a semantic approach to the description of discourse markers (DM). The object of our analysis are two DM that derive from the verb *dire / skazat'* (= to say): *pour ainsi dire* (=lit. for so to say) in French and *tak skazat'* (= lit. so to say) in Russian. The analysis of DM that derives from the speech verb (*dire / skazat* – to say) presents much of an interest as raising the problem of the communication in general.

According to the adopted approach, we will describe the basic tasks of the communication: (1) the selection of appropriated words that together will form an utterance conveying some state of affairs (Z); and (2) the account of the hearer that should interpret the words of S0.

We will demonstrate that these two points of view on which is based the communication are crucial to distinguish the semantics of *dire / skazat'* and of DM that derive from these verbs. Consistent with the description of the two verbs and of the others constituents of the DM, we formulate the semantic identity of each DM. In the last part, we explore the application of the schematic form in different contexts of the use.

### Introduction.

It is commonly assumed that discourse markers (DM) are a sort of “functional words” which have different functions according to the context of their use. In this paper we want to argue a semantic approach to the description of DM. This approach was elaborated in the field of a French-Russian research project on discourse words (*mots du discours*) (Laboratoire UMR 7110, the coordinator of the project Denis Paillard) and is based on the theory of utterance (*théorie de l'énonciation*) of Antoine Culioli.

We will adopt some theoretical points that are necessary for our analysis. The main characteristics of DM consists in their ability to confer a discourse status to the sequence p corresponding to its scope (p). Thus the sequence introduced by a DM is presented as a particular way of saying a state of affairs (Z) (cf. Paillard, 2001/2002). This definition implies two consequences : 1) each DM has its own semantic identity which can be formulated through a schematic form; 2) this semantic identity is subject to different variations in the context .

Our research deals with DM of verbal origin and in particular with DM that derive from the verb *dire* (= to say) in French and its equivalent in Russian – *skazat'*. In this paper we will focus on the description of two DM that have the same constituents in both languages but convey different meanings: *pour ainsi dire* (=lit. for so to say) in French and *tak skazat'* (= lit. so to say) in Russian.

The analysis of DM that derives from the speech verb (*dire / skazat* – to say) presents much of an interest as raising the problem of the communication in general. Main tasks of the communication (as drawn by recent studies on vagueness, cf. notably Jucker, Smith, Lüdge, 2003) consists, on the one hand, in searching of a way to evoke appropriate mental representations of the world, and on the other hand, in interpreting what was said. We will see that the semantics of the two verbs (*dire / skazat'*) take into account these two tasks of the communication.

This contribution is composed of three parts. Firstly, we will give a general presentation of our research object – DM *pour ainsi dire* and *tak skazat'*. Secondly, we will describe the constituents of both of DM, in particular the verbs *dire / skazat'* the analysis of which will lead us to formulate the

semantic identity of each DM. Finally, we will draw the variability of the identity of the DM (formulated before) in different contexts of its use.

## 1. General description.

Both of DM are described by the Dictionaries in the article dedicated to the verbs *dire / skazat'*.

Le Grand Robert defines the speech formula *pour ainsi dire* as a marker of the approximation synonymous to *presque* (= approximately, almost) or as a marker of the mitigation.

The Dictionary of Ozhegov describes *tak skazat'* as a parenthesis (in Russian, *vvodnoe slovo*) used to soften a statement.

There is a more detailed description of *pour ainsi dire (pad)* proposed by J. Authier-Revuz in her book « Les mots qui ne vont pas de soi ». The author distinguishes two type of contexts of use:

- 1) a metaphoric nomination: where *pad* indicates that there is no direct link between the word and the object (that is illustrated by a gloss *pas vraiment p* = not really p: *Il est **pour ainsi dire** le chef.* - He is **pour ainsi dire** the chief);
- 2) an approximate nomination (described by a gloss: *pas tout à fait p* = not completely p: *On est **pour ainsi dire** arrivé.* - We have **pour ainsi dire** (almost) arrived).

*Tak skazat'* (*tsk*) is described also in the dictionary of Russian “structure words” (ed. by V. Morkovkin) where two contexts of use are distinguished. *Tsk* is used:

- 1) to soften a description (*tridtsat' pjat' let ... vozrast, **tak skazat'**, kriticheskij* - 35 years ... the age **tak skazat'** critical);
- 2) to indicate that the introduced term is not “a good term” (*Pokazanija ego bred. A, **tak skazat'**, obvinjaemyj, to est' lihčno ja, segodnja zdes', a zavtra...* - His testimony is a delirium. And, **tak skazat'**, the accused, I mean, me personally, today is here, but tomorrow...).

## 2. Semantic stability.

### Basic problems of the communication.

Before describing the semantics of the verbs *dire / skazat'* we will precise some statements on the communication in general.

We adopt the approach to the communication proposed in several articles of A. Culioli, which is similar to a point of view developed in the articles on vagueness in conversation. That is, “speakers must find a way to evoke appropriate mental representations of the people, places, and things they want to talk about. For any given entity, there is an unlimited variety of ways to refer to it, and candidate expressions in a language vary in their level of precision of reference”. (Jucker, Smith, Lüdge, 2003: 1739). We will demonstrate that *pad* and *tsk* confer to the scope the status of a vague expression, but this discourse status evokes different semantic characteristics.

The basic problems of the communication can be presented by a set phrase of the everyday use in the colloquial language that involves all the constituents of the process of the communication: *si tu vois ce que que je veux dire par là* (= *if you see what I want to say by that*). In this phrase: the speaker *I* (S0) tries to transmit to the hearer (addressee) *you* (S1) through / by the words (*by that*) a representation which he (S0) has in his mind, according to what have noted Sperber and Wilson, “on a more fundamental level, every utterance is used to represent a thought of the speaker’s” (1995: 230).

At the same time the hearer should interpret the words of S0 (*if you see*) but it is probable that his interpretation does not coincide with the representation of the speaker. That implies another crucial characteristics of the communication: the words do not establish one direct link with the world, as have argued Jucker et al., “every utterance is only an approximation to the very thought the speaker has in mind” (2003: 1741).

Consequently, the communication supposes that the utterance, which is used to represent a thought of the speaker, have to be interpreted by the hearer. That implies : (1) the selection of appropriated words that together will form an utterance conveying some state of affairs (Z); and (2) the account of the hearer that should interpret the words of S0.

We will demonstrate that these two points of view on which is based the communication are crucial to distinguish the semantics of *dire / skazat'* and of DM that derive from these verbs.

### **Analysis of the verbs *dire / skazat'*.**

#### ***Dire.***

*Dire* derives from the Indo-European root : \**deik* ('to show') which is present also in the German verb *zeigen*. Consistent with the suggestions about communication as quoted above, we will formulate the semantics of the verb *dire* as following: *dire* means that a representation of some state of affairs Z is exteriorised by giving to it a form. In other words, the representation which represents the thoughts of S0 is transmitted with a help of the words.

#### ***Skazat'***

The origin of *skazat'* is more complex : it is a prefixed verb with a stem *kaz* and a prefix *s-*.

To describe the verb *skazat'* we will use the semantic description of its constituents. As Dobrushina, Paillard (2001) have proposed, the stem *-kaz-* means the following: a representation (R), which belongs to a bearer (support) of the R, is actualised by an element that corresponds to a source of this R.

The prefix *s-* (several uses of which have been described by Agafonov, 2000, 2004) marks that the origin of the R are the words.

The verb *skazat'* means that the words evoke a representation R of some state of affairs Z; the support of the R is the hearer (S1). In other words: the words actualised a R which belongs to S. The semantics of *skazat'* foregrounds the hearer's point of view.

Contextual differences of the use of the two verbs can be explained by this involving of different constituents of the communication.

The French verb *dire* is often used to form expressions of reformulation (*c'est à dire, ça veut dire, qu'est ce que tu veux dire*, etc.) which attract attention to the words. The complements of *dire* correspond to the nouns that characterize the form of what is said (*oui/non, bonjour, la messe, son avis, son idée, des gros mots, etc.*).

The Russian verb *skazat'* take into account the hearer S1 and his interpretation of what is said : its semantics is based on the adjustment between S0 and S1. The use of *skazat'* establishes two points of view: somebody who introduces the words and somebody who interprets them.

This difference between the two verbs implies the differences between the DM derived from these verbs.

To formulate the semantic identity in terms of schematic form of each DM we will take into account the semantics of the verbs *dire / skazat'* as well as the semantics of other constituents: the adverbs of manner *ainsi / tak* (so, in this way) and the preposition *pour* (for).

#### **Schematic form.**

*Pour ainsi dire* means that:

- the representation R of the state of affairs Z is exteriorised by the words p;
- for the speaker these words correspond to a particular way to say Z;
- this particular way means that the words are exterior to Z but the appropriation (*adequacy*) of p to Z is possible because p has something to deal with Z.

*Tak skazat'* means that:

- the words are the source of the representation R of the state of affairs Z;
- these words do not completely correspond to what the speaker wants to say;
- the appropriation (*adequacy*) of the words to Z depends exclusively on the words and not on the speaker;
- the speaker marks that the representation formed by this word is out of his control.

Comments.

According to the description of DM, both of DM confer a certain discourse status to the sequence p which corresponds to the scope. Consistent with the features of the communication described above, these words are used to represent a representation of some state of affairs Z.

The differences lies on the approach to the words. The semantics of *dire* concerns the selection of the appropriated words. *Pad* is focused on the status of p as a possible way to say Z. The semantics of *skazat'* draws on the foreground the problem of the adjustment between S0 and S1. *Tsk* marks the disengagement of the speaker which does not assume the responsibility for what he says.

### 3. Contextual variability.

In this part, we will explore the application of the schematic form in different contexts of the use of the DM.

#### ***Pour ainsi dire***

The words p (the scope of *pad*) as a particularly way of saying Z, imply different kinds of links with Z. Three types of relations are possible:

- Metaphorical use. The words p a priori correspond to a non-appropriate way of saying Z, *pad* marks that the words p have something to deal with Z: the speaker takes into account the similarities between what indicates the word p and the state of affairs Z the he tries to describe, and at the same time he eliminates the differences.

*Deux nouveau-nés dans la presse. Et pour ainsi dire jumeaux. Allô ! et Oh Là ! Avec, dans les deux cas, le nécessaire point d'exclamation comme un tauromachique Olé ! Ij*  
(Two new-borns in the press. And **pour ainsi dire** the twins. Allô ! et Oh Là !)

- Conventional nomination. The words p correspond to a typical way of saying Z: *pad* in contrast to the first context of the use, marks that p is exterior to Z, so it is not an appropriate way to say Z.

*Roland Barthes pensait que l' Œdipe grec, le "vrai" pour ainsi dire, avait depuis longtemps épuisé ses charmes, qu'il n'était plus apte à agir sur notre imagination, et que seul Freud avait remis le train du drame en route, nous faisant encore rêver sur l'aveugle de Thèbes.*

*(Roland Barthes thought that a Greek Edipe, the real **pour ainsi dire**, had exhausted his charms (...), and that only Freud had set him on his feet (...))*

- Approximation. To convey Z, the speaker uses a term p from exterior that says something opposite to Z, at the same time *pad* indicates that Z is not far from p.

*Il n'y avait pour ainsi dire personne. (There was **pour ainsi dire** nobody.)*

*Cependant, à côté de la mythologie officielle en courait une autre, clandestine, qui concernait les biens de consommation. Sous Staline, il n'y avait **pour ainsi dire** pas de tourisme étranger, et l'économie parallèle alimentée par les produits achetés en fraude n'existait pas encore.*

It is interesting to note that the scope in this context has some particular properties: it can be a negative construction or a certain type of verbs (resultative verbs) or adjectives.

*On est pour ainsi dire arrivé. (We are **pour ainsi dire** arrived.)*

(..) *En Allemagne, la violence du football s'est **pour ainsi dire** institutionnalisée. Chaque club draine, dans son sillage, une groupe plus ou moins important de "hools". Au mieux, ils sont ignorés. Au pis, ils sont soutenus. Au-delà des clubs, certains partis politiques d'extrême droite voient là un excellent vivier.* 21j

### **Tak skazat'**

The disengagement of S0 implies different status of p in the context. It is possible to distinguish the following contexts of the use:

- Conventional use. The disengagement of the speaker lies on the character of p: these are the words that are generally used in the similar situation. By marking p as not his own words, the speaker focuses on the possible non-appropriation of p to Z.

*Mne vse vremja kazalos' chto Agasfer Lukich terzaet etogo zhirnogo startsa iz, **tak skazat'**, pedagogicheskix soobrazhenij (...)*

*(It seemed to me that A.L. was tormenting this old man for, **tak skazat'**, pedagogical reasons (...))*

- Metaphorical use. In contrast to the first type, in this case the words p correspond a priori to a non-appropriated nomination of Z. The speaker takes his distance realizing this specificity of p as an individual way of the speaker to say Z.

*Bojus' on nash budushchij, **tak skazat'**, collega ili sotovarshch. A mozhet I obratno vyskochit, vsje zavisit ot kakix-to vysshix, nam s vami neizvestnyx obstojatel'stv.*

*(I am afraid he is our future, **tak skazat'**, colleague or our companion.)*

*Serjozha: Kto-o?! – Natasha: Andrei, **tak skazat'**, moj drug. Sejchas ja tebe vsje objasnju.*

*(- Who-o?! – Andrej is, **tak skazat'**, a friend of mine. I will explain you everything.)*

- Quotation. The words p belong to another discourse and evoke a different speaker. The speaker keeps his distance because p is a somebody's else way to say Z.

*Vot uzh nikogda by ne podumal, chto u Xinkusa est' druzja, kotorye soglasny razdelit' s nim ego odinichestvo. Xotja pochemu by I net? Pourquoi pas, **tak skazat'**...*

*(I wouldn't ever imagine that Xinkus has friends (...)...although why not? Pourquoi pas, **tak skazat'**...)*

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