

# In the First Three Seconds: The Discourse Particles *Okay* and *So* at Initial Position in Monologic iTunes University Lectures

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## 要 旨

本研究はイェール大学の講義の開始点(initial position)における談話標識 *okay* と *so* の機能を考察する。開始点とは、講義を行う人が最初に言う単語を指す。講義の開始点における談話標識 *okay* と *so* の分析は、談話標識 *okay* が直に始まる長い単独発話の生産を示唆することと、談話標識 *so* が直に始まる前回の講義の復習を示唆することを証明した。勿論、講義を行う人は必ずしも談話標識 *okay* または *so* を講義の開始点で使用したわけではない。だが、開始点の後に用いられた談話標識 *okay* と *so* は依然として直に始まる長い単独発話の生産を、または直に始まる前回の講義の復習を示唆した。しかも、本研究の分析は談話標識の選択性を解明した。講義を行う人は談話標識 *okay* と *so* なしに講義を始めた例もあった。本研究のデータは談話標識 *okay* が直に始まる単独発話の生産を示唆する機能があることと、談話標識 *so* が直に始まる講義の復習を示唆する機能があることを暫定的に証明する。

**Keywords:** *Okay, So, Discourse Marker, Institutional Talk, Conversation Analysis*

## 1. Introduction

Discourse particles are a ubiquitous in interaction, sometimes bordering on the surreptitiously banal, and as a result are often dismissed as meaningless palaver. Natural conversations are usually saturated with discourse particles, and many scholars have even claimed that discourse particles appear with high regularity in everyday chit-chat (Jucker & Smith 1998; Frank-Job 2006). Indeed, one of the central characteristics of discourse markers is omnipresence in verbal interaction; that is, discourse markers frequently appear in natural verbal interactions, and this could be a central characteristic.

The idea that appearance of discourse particles strongly correlates to register informality and friendly discourse is also well established. Yet, discourse markers are not just indicators of quotidian

interactional intent, or signals of informal speech. Actually, research into institutional talk has elucidated the fact that even formal interactional contexts are commonly peppered with discourse particles (Rendle-Short 1999, 2003). Therefore, even institutional varieties of interaction, which are commonly assumed to be more formal and therefore lack the cognitive disquiet supposedly represented by discourse particles, are often permeated with them. Accordingly, it must be said that discourse particles are a hallmark of verbal interaction.

The ubiquity of discourse particles, however, has not inevitably led to a clear research taxonomy of discourse particles. Indeed, no field of linguistics may be as cursed with a greater plethora of nomenclature and classification systems than the study of discourse particles. Depending on the methodological background, scholars have catalogued discourse markers under a surfeit of names: “response cries” (Goffman 1981), “cue phrases” (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990), “discourse markers” (Rendle-Short 2003), “lexical fillers” (James 1983), “tokens” (Kasper 2009), “receipt tokens” (Young & Lee 2004), “sequential markers” (Sidnell 2010), “connectives” (Halliday & Hasan 1976), “pragmatic markers” (Ajimer, Foolen, & Simon-Vandenberg 2006). The glut of taxonomic nomenclature is probably the inevitable result of the study of the heterogeneous discourse particles. Indeed, if omnipresence is the central character of discourse particles, then heteronomy is a second.

Although discourse particles in dialogic and multilogic interactions have been well researched since the advent of research into discourse particles, research into discourse markers in monologic interaction is still rather sparse, likely because of the perception that monologic interaction represents a genre with a dearth of discourse particles. Some scholars have strongly implied that one of the dividing lines between everyday conversational interaction and institutional talk is the presence or lack of discourse particles (Heritage & Clayman 2010). However, this assumption cannot be reconciled with research into discourse particles in monologic interaction. Research by Rendle-Short (1999, 2003) has demonstrated that institutional talk does indeed have discourse particles. Accordingly, it must be accepted that discourse particles play an important role in even institutional talk.

This paper examines the function of the discourse particles “okay” and “so” in monologic interactions, which are represented by Yale University undergraduate lectures. Although Rendle-Short (1999, 2003) demonstrates that discourse particles appear in many locations in lectures, this paper will focus on only lecture beginnings, or “initial position.” An examination of many undergraduate lectures reveals that the discourse particle “okay” marks the imminent inauguration of a lecture. All material

before the deployment of the discourse particle “okay” is superfluous to the main body of the lecture. Furthermore, the discourse particle “so” adumbrates a retrospective orientation toward the previous lecture material; that is, it signals the imminent review of information from the topic of the last lecture.

## **2. Previous Studies**

Studies of discourse particles are a relatively recent phenomenon. Although research into facets of discourse particles, usually the incongruity of discourse particles and syntax, goes back to the 1950s, the first dedicated studies of discourse particles only made their appearance in the mid-1980s. Accordingly, discourse particle research is only 30 years old. However, in order to grasp the interactional significance of discourse particles, one must define them (section 2.1), especially the central topic of this paper, the discourse particles “okay”, and “so”, and integrate discourse particles into larger methodologies of communication (section 2.2). Yet, a perfect fit cannot be expected from a forced amalgamation between the two, so further original ideas concerning how to integrate the two will be advanced (section 2.3).

### **2.1. Discourse particles**

#### **2.1.1. The Definition of Discourse Markers and Discourse Particles**

With the advent of generative grammar over 60 years ago, elements of language that would later be designated “discourse markers” were described as spawn of linguistic performance, and shunted away from linguistics proper; that is, all elements of language that could not be considered part of cognitive sentence constructions were consigned to the proverbial dust bin of linguistics (Chomsky 1957). It was not a far step to remove linguistic performance from the realm of serious scholarship. This standpoint can still be seen in areas of linguistics that assign superlative importance to syntax, an idea which is derivative of the notion that syntax is linguistically prior to the muddling effect of actual performance in communication.

However, with the advent of sociolinguistics, scholars of linguistics recognized that language cannot be divorced from communication, claiming that language is more than isolated cognitive structures (Levinson 1983). The study of non-syntactic elements of language praxis that can be considered discourse markers began in earnest with Schiffrin’s (1987) and Schourup’s (1985) groundbreaking studies. Further advances in communication theories, such as relevance theory and especially conversation analysis, militated against the older syntax-centered linguistic idea that language syntax is linguistically prior to performance (Blakemore

1987, 1992, 2002; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974). Indeed, conversation analysts, reversing the claim advanced by generative grammar, demonstrate that communicative intent is prior to syntax; that is, interlocutors adapt syntax to intent, not the other way around (Schegloff 1996).

Yet, in spite of three decades of research into discourse markers, the taxonomy of discourse markers has not settled into mutually agreed-upon categories or nomenclature. The legion of potential names for discourse markers should be understood less as an indication of variance between linguistic theories and more of an indication of the extreme heteronomy of discourse markers themselves (Fischer 2006). After all, as has been mentioned from the earliest days of discourse marker research, discourse markers probably do not constitute a natural part of speech as almost all of the elements that could be considered discourse markers derive from different parts of speech. Accordingly, any honest study of discourse markers entails “staking out territory”: the researcher must define discourse markers even as the scholarly world continues to debate the same question. Therefore, the definition proposed here is tentative.

This study adopts the descriptive framework for discourse markers proposed by Fischer (2006) to categorize discourse markers. This is not because Fischer's framework is the most exact—it certainly is not—nor because Fischer's framework accounts for all aspects of the heteronomous discourse markers—it doesn't do that either. But Fischer's framework is malleable enough to allow for the inclusion of a number of potentially very heterogeneous discourse markers, even though it does sacrifice considerable taxonomic exactitude in the effort. More specifically, Fischer (2006) establishes a number of characteristics for discourse marker status, but fully admits that not all lexemes fully qualify for every trait proposed. Therefore, some lexemes will qualify for more characteristics of discourse markers than others will, and accordingly there will be a scale of discourse markers, some higher or lower on the scale.

According to Fischer's framework, the first characteristic of discourse markers concerns their relationship with syntax—or, more specifically, the lack thereof: discourse markers are not part of syntactic structures, and therefore operate on a different linguistic plane than syntax (Chomsky 1957; Schiffrin 1987; Fischer 2006). Furthermore, discourse markers are monosemous; in other words, discourse markers express one core meaning that can metaphorically shade given a certain pragmatic context (Blakemore 2002; Fischer 2006; Heritage 1984, 1998; Sidnell 2007; O'Neal 2010a). Discourse markers also indicate the procedure through which a speaker wishes their interlocutor to process the utterance; that is, discourse markers express procedural meanings, not conceptual meanings like most other parts of speech, although again there is debate about whether such a clean dichotomy is actually tenable and justifiable (Schourup 2001, 2011; Blakemore

2002; Fischer 2006; Fraser 2006; Borderia 2008).

Another key element of discourse markers is semantic bleaching; that is, one of the effects of the synchronic development of discourse markers is that the semantic meaning of the lexical item from which the discourse marker is etymologically derived has slowly been bleached out of existence, and replaced with an entirely procedural meaning instead. Semantic bleaching is a critical divide between discourse markers and discourse particles. Discourse markers retain at least some of the original semantic meaning of the lexical item from which they are derived; discourse particles, however, do not. For example, the discourse particle “you know” retains some of the original meaning referring to cognitive states that is derivative of the verb “know” (Fischer 2006; Macaulay 2000). Similarly, the discourse marker “I mean” continues to display some of the original meaning of the verb in conversation (Wong & Zhang Waring 2010). Accordingly, discourse markers are not fully semantically bleached, but could very well be in the process of becoming so.

On the other hand, particles such as “well”, “so”, and “okay” have procedural meanings in interaction far removed from their original semantic meanings of the adverbial “well”, coordinate conjunction “as a result”, and adjectival “sufficient” respectively. In the case of the discourse particle “okay”, the original semantic meaning of “sufficient” has been replaced with a procedural meaning of “transition to something new” in many dialogic interactions. In the case of the discourse particle “so”, the coordinating conjunction “so” meaning of “as a result”, the intensifier “so” meaning something close to “very”, and the anaphoric manner adverb “so” meaning “as mentioned before” have been replaced with the procedural meaning of “transition to the teleological orientation of the interaction” in many multilogic and dialogic interactions (O’Neal 2011).

### **2.1.2. The Discourse Particle “Okay”**

As with many discourse particle, the discourse particle “okay” has multiple functions. The most common meaning associated with the discourse particle “okay” derives from scholars who utilize conversation analytic methodology. These scholars claim that the deployment of the discourse particle “okay” in dialogic and multilogic discourse marks the culmination of a sequential activity (Schegloff 1986, 2007; Beach 1990, 1993, 1995). That is, the discourse particle “okay” can be deployed after the nominal end of a sequence to indicate that the speaker considers the sequence to be at its termination. Furthermore, Beach (1993, 1995) claims that the discourse marker “okay”, while certainly suggestive of a sequential termination, also projects another turn constructional unit after its deployment. In other words, the discourse marker

“okay” is indicative of the understanding that a sequential activity is finished while simultaneously projective of the incipient production of another sequential activity by the same speaker.

Furthermore, some conversation analytic research on telephone conversations (Schegloff & Sacks 1973; Button 1987, 1990; Bangerter, Clark, & Katz 2004) reveals the effect of co-deployment of the discourse marker “okay” at the very end of interactions to lead the interaction into conversational closings. In other words, when the discourse marker “okay” is deployed consecutively in bordering turns, both parties to the interaction display a willingness to terminate the conversation itself, not just the sequential activity.

In addition, many scholars have noted that the discourse marker “okay” can be utilized as a continuer, or a back-channel signal (Schegloff 1981; Filipi & Wales 2003). In dialogic or multilogic interaction, the discourse marker “okay” can be used to display listenership. “Okay” can be deployed during conversation, usually along with other types of continuers such as “uh-huh” and “yeah”. As a collective set, continuers indicate that interlocutors pass on the opportunity to take a turn at a potential transition relevant place, and therefore encourage the speaker to extend the turn.

Schegloff (2009) has also mentioned that “okay + uh(m) + silence” can indicate a re-exit from a sequence when the interlocutor has not availed themselves of an opportunity to take the floor after a previous transitional relevant place. That is, the discourse particle “okay”, in combination with two other signals, can indicate, or mark, a location in the dialogic interaction that shows the speaker attempted to end their sequential contribution, but the end of the contribution was not ratified as such by the interlocutor.

More recently, O'Neal (2010b) has suggested that the discourse marker “okay” can be deployed to adumbrate an extended turn. In this formulation, the discourse marker “okay” collocates with other projectors of extended turns, such as pre-sequences and story pre-tellings to indicate that a long stretch of discourse is on the immediate interactional horizon. Although the discourse marker “okay” deployed in sequence closing position indicates sequential closure, the discourse marker “okay” deployed between a pre-sequence, especially a story-telling pre-sequence, and the first pair part of an extended story seems to presage long, though temporary, monologic talk. Indeed, in the cases examined, the turn-taking system shut down temporarily after the collocated deployment of both pre-sequences and the discourse marker “okay.” Accordingly, it seems that the discourse marker “okay” also adumbrates the advent of temporary monologic interaction within dialogic and multilogic interaction.

Of course, not all scholars who have researched the discourse marker “okay” employ conversation analytic methodology. Cordon (1986, 2001) insists that the discourse particle “okay” is deployed in dialogic

and multilogic interaction in order to orient to expected events and outcomes, and she claims that the discourse marker “okay” contrasts with the discourse marker “well” to create a dichotomy between marking expected events and unexpected events. Other scholars have claimed that the discourse marker “okay” is systematically deployed at the culmination of projects subsidiary to the accomplishment of other projects (Bangerter & Clark 2002; Cordon & Cech 2007).

However, one of the things in common to all of the previous research is that they only studied dialogic and multilogic interaction. Very few studies have contemplated the usage of discourse markers in monologic interaction. Indeed, as far as the author knows, only Rendle-Short has done so. Rendle-Short (1999) claims that the discourse marker “okay” collocates with the beginning of a new topic or sub-topic within a lecture. That is, the discourse marker “okay” in monologic interaction, like the discourse marker “okay” in dialogic and multilogic interaction, is interconnected with openings and closings of a sort.

### 2.1.3. The Discourse Particle “So”

The discourse particle “so” has a plethora of communication functions. Bolden (2006, 2008) examined the discourse particle “so” in the first pair parts of dialogic and multilogic sequences. According to Bolden’s analysis, the discourse particle “so” is deployed when the speaker intends to implement incipient actions; in other words, the speaker prefaces the first pair part of a sequence with the discourse particle “so” to signal that the imminent first pair part will not be a direct outgrowth of the previous sequences, nor directly coordinated with the preceding talk. Therefore, the discourse particle “so” in this analysis is a disjunction signal, which marks the subsequent interactional contribution as not a topical outgrowth of the previous talk. Certain textbook authors share Bolden’s analysis, although in somewhat attenuated form. McCarthy, McCarten, & Sandiford (2006) claim that the discourse particle “so” can signal a topic change among other functions.

Recently, O’Neal (2011) has gone a little further and claimed that the discourse particle “so” is more than just a topic transition signal. Although the discourse particle “so” certainly projects an imminent topical transition, it also adumbrates something else: the teleology of the entire conversation. According to this analysis, the discourse particle “so” indeed prefaces a topical transition, but it also marks the next topic as the teleological purpose of the interaction itself. In other words, the discourse particle “so” marks a transition to the topic that is the purpose of the interaction. Therefore, the discourse particle “so” is more than just a topic transition signal. The discourse particle “so” is rather the mark of the imminent appearance of the reason for

the interaction's launching. Accordingly, the discourse particle "so" in dialogic and multilogic interactions is more teleologically oriented than it is topically oriented.

Other scholars have discovered a discourse particle "so" in post-expansion environments in dialogic and multilogic interactions that has nothing to do with topic transitions. Raymond (2004) has noticed that the discourse particle "so" sometimes appears after a second pair part, but before the advent of a new first pair part. According to the analysis in Raymond (2004), the discourse particle "so" in post-expansion environments expresses a prompting action; that is, when the discourse particle "so" is deployed in post-expansion environments, it signals that the previous second pair part failed to achieve conversational relevance. This kind of discourse particle "so" is often treated as a request for further information, and as a signal that something more was expected from the previous second pair part.

Schegloff (2009) has noted the practice of using "so + uh(m) + silence" in combination after a previous attempt to signal the end of a sequential contribution that was not ratified as a sequential closure by the interlocutor. In other words, the discourse particle "so" can be used to indicate that the speaker attempted to close the sequence through other closure-relevant signals, but failed to do so, and then attempts to use the discourse particle "so" in combination with other signals to make the same sequential closing move more salient, in the hope of being ratified by the other interlocutor. This usage is somewhat similar to the one noted by Schifffrin (1987), who claims that the discourse particle "so" demonstrates that the speaker wishes the interlocutor to initiate speaker change, or at the very least, signals the end of the speaker's conversational contribution.

However, all of the above studies have only researched the discourse particle "so" in dialogic and multilogic interaction. The exception, again, is Rendle-Short. Rendle-Short (2003) examined the appearance of the discourse particle "so" in monologic lectures and concluded that the discourse particle "so" in monologic discourse is not a topic transition signal at all. Rather, it adumbrates a concluding overview of the entire previous section.

## **2.2. Conversation Analytic Methodology**

The analysis within this study relies on conversation analytic methodology. Conversation Analysis (hereafter, CA) is an ethnographic theory of interaction that views all interaction, even monologic interaction, as sequentially unfolding, participant-driven, locally-managed, and practice-oriented. Accordingly, interaction of all types can be investigated for its underlying normative mechanics (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974,



Schegloff 2007, Seedhouse 2004). Moreover, CA claims that any instance or facet of interaction could be consequential for the participants of the interaction in some way: any little “uh”, any minor “um”, or in-breath of air, no matter how seemingly irrelevant or inconsequential, cannot be dismissed, a priori, as otiose or random (Heritage 1984). Accordingly, CA views linguistic performance as the prime manifestation of communication, not the detritus of cognitive structures.

### 2.2.1. Institutional Talk

In the methodology of conversation analysis, all institutional talk is assessed according to the differences between institutional talk and regular conversation. One of the explicit assumptions about institutional talk in conversation analytic methodology is that one of the delineating borders between everyday conversation and institutional talk is the presence or absence of discourse markers (Heritage & Clayman 2010). Conversation analysts have conceived of everyday conversation as the standard by which interactions that are more formal are interpreted. Indeed, conversation analysts insist that conversation is the norm, and institutional talk is the derivation. For instance, according to Heritage and Clayman (2010), a key characteristic of interactions between lawyers and witnesses during cross-examinations in courtrooms is the lack of discourse markers that indicate a change of state like the discourse marker “oh.” That is, they claim that a lack of everyday conversational praxis is emblematic of institutional interaction.

However, there are some very serious problems with such a simple dichotomy. For one thing, institutional talk is just as permeated with discourse markers as everyday conversation, as this study intends to demonstrate. In fact, at least for institutional talk in the form of academic lectures, not clear dichotomy exists when juxtaposing the presence of discourse particles in everyday conversations and institutional talk. Although this study adopts conversation analysis methodology, this does not mean this study fully accepts the idea that institutional talk is derivative of everyday conversation. It is unlikely that such a simple derivative dichotomy is actually empirically justified.

### 2.3. Initial Position

Some of the key concepts of conversation analysis, such as sequence, turn, and projection, are difficult to apply to monologic interactions. Indeed, most conversation analysis explicates interactional praxis through the way interactants treat previous contributions to the talk (sequentially unfolding, participant-driven, locally-managed). However, the most common interactive feature of monologic interaction is, by definition,

the continued silence of one party. Although silence is an action, and observable that way in many cases, it does make an analysis of interaction problematic in some instances.

In order to avoid the potential pitfalls of interpreting everything according to the mirror of silence, new terminology is proposed: "initial position." Initial Position is defined, rather banally, as the first vocalized word in the lecture; that is, initial position in a monologic interaction is occupied by the first lexeme uttered by the speaker. This notion is critical to this study because this study proposes that the very first lexeme of the lecture actually projects, or adumbrates, information concerning about what is to come.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Materials**

The data set comprises 121 video-recorded lectures from five different Yale University undergraduate courses available for free download from the iTunes University program. The iTunes University program is also freely available online ([www.itunes.com](http://www.itunes.com)). The five lecture series chosen at random from the sixty-two available are Ancient Greek history, Astrophysics, European Civilization, The Moral Foundations of Politics, and Political Philosophy. Most of the publically available lectures are humanities courses, so the classes chosen at random do represent a good cross-section of the possible lectures.

#### **3.2. Procedures**

This study only examines the function of the discourse particles "okay" and "so" at initial position. Furthermore, this study assumes that the function of the discourse particles "okay" and "so" manifest within a minute of their appearance in any interaction. No evidence exists that a discourse particles absolutely must manifest its function within a short-time span, but most research also assumes this to be the case (Blakemore 2002). Therefore, the first one-minute of the 121 video-recorded lectures were examined, for a total of 121 minutes of raw data. Lectures with the discourse particles "okay" or "so" were tallied on chart 1 (see section 4), as were lectures with the discourse particles "okay" and "so" at positions other than initial position. Lectures begun with anything other than the discourse particles "okay" and "so" were also tallied. Exemplary instances of lectures containing both the discourse particle "okay" and "so" we transcribed according to conversation analytic transcription conventions (see appendix).

Conversation analysis deems that collocation demonstrates, or at the very least suggests, function.

That is, a lexeme's proximity to a discourse action is indicative of its function. Accordingly, the utterances collocated after the discourse particles "okay" and "so" were considered strongly indicative of the purpose of the deployment of the discourse particles "okay" and "so". Therefore, the discourse function of the utterances after the deployment of the discourse particle "okay" and "so" were equated with the monologic discourse function of the discourse particles "okay" and "so."

#### 4. Results

The results will be analyzed below in three sections: section 4.1 will discuss the ramifications of the appearance of discourse particles "okay" at initial position, which was the standard and most common example of the appearance of the discourse particle "okay" in the data set; section 4.2 will discuss the implications of the appearance of the discourse particles "okay" after initial position, but before the end of the first minute of the lectures, which was a very rare occurrence but was also simultaneously extremely suggestive of what the function of the discourse particle "okay" is; section 4.3 will discuss the effect of the appearance of the discourse particle "so" at initial position, which was the most common place for the discourse particle "so" to appear in; section 4.4 will examine examples of the discourse particle "so" that appeared after initial position, which, like the discourse particle "okay", was extremely rare; and lastly, section 4.5 will examine the outcome of the complete lack of the discourse particles "okay" and "so" at either initial position or anywhere else in the first minute of the lectures, which will demonstrate that the discourse particles under consideration in this paper are wholly optional and used at the discretion of the lecturer. The tally for the appearance of the discourse particles "okay" and "so" in all lectures is displayed below in Chart 1.

**Chart 1: Occupants of Initial Position**

Lecture Series Title	Total Number of Lectures	Discourse particle “okay” at initial position	Discourse particle “so” at initial position	Discourse particle “okay” after initial position	Discourse particle “so” after initial position	Lectures with other initial features
Ancient Greek History	24	2	0	0	0	22
Astrophysics	24	8	2	0	0	14
European Civilization	24	5	2	0	1	16
The Moral Foundations of Politics	25	8	11	0	3	7
Political Philosophy	24	4	0	2	0	20
Total	121	27 (22%)	15 (12%)	2 (1%)	4 (3%)	79 (65%)

Overall, it can be seen that the discourse particle “okay” appears at the initial position in about one-fourth of the lectures. The discourse particle “so” appears at initial position with almost half of that frequency. Neither the discourse particle “okay” nor the discourse particle “so” had a salient tendency to appear after initial position but within the first minute of the lecture. When they did, their appearance held special import (see sections 4.3 & 4.4). Utterances other than the discourse particle “okay” and “so” appeared at initial position sixty-five percent of the time, more than half of the lectures, but this category is far more heterogeneous than the category label belies: this category includes utterances as varied as “welcome back” to “last time we talked about the big rip.” Accordingly, it is fair to say that the discourse particle “okay” is the most common lecture-initial lexeme in this category.

#### 4.1. Lectures with a discourse particle “okay” at initial position

At initial position in monologic interactions, by far and away, the most common discourse particle is the discourse particle “okay”. Furthermore, the most common initial position lexeme is also the discourse particle “okay.” This is not an accident. Initial position and the discourse particle “okay” seem to have the same, or at the very least similar, purposes. The most common usage of the discourse particle “okay” is to initiate the monologic interaction itself, as the typical examples below illustrate.

Below is the first transparent example of the discourse particle “okay” signaling the imminent inauguration of a lecture. The example is taken from the second lecture of “The Moral Foundations of Politics” series. The professor begins the lecture with the discourse particle “okay”, and collocates it with a clause that is strongly indicative of the purpose of both the discourse particle “okay” and initial position.

*Example 1: The Moral Foundations of Politics: Lecture 02*

*Professor: Okay so, let's begin. I asked you to, to bear two questions in mind.*

As can be seen above, the first lexeme in the monologic interaction, a lecture on morality in politics, is the discourse particle “okay”. Furthermore, the discourse particle “okay” is collocated with “so, let's begin,” which is strongly indicative of the purpose of the discourse particle “okay” in initial position. If the conversation analytic position that collocation reveals function is true, then the fact that the discourse particle “okay” collocates with “let's begin” is strongly indicative an the inaugurating function of the discourse particle “okay.” Of course, the fact that the lecture began with the discourse particle “okay” should also lend additional evidence for that view.

Another example will illuminate the role of the discourse particle “okay” as the harbinger of the onset of a lecture. The next example is taken from the Political Philosophy series, and the lecturer deploys the discourse particle “okay” at initial position before launching into a preview of some of the activities planned during the lecture.

*Example 2: Political Philosophy: Lecture 14*

*Professor: Okay, good morning. We're, we're gonna, I'm gonna show another movie today.*

*Students: Yeahhhh*

*Professor: But, not, not until a little bit later in the class*

*Students: Ughn[nnn]*

*Professor: [Nhhh. <We'll get it. We'll get it.> We'll get there. Don't worry.*

The lecturer dutifully deploys the discourse particle “okay” and then conveys to the students a portion

of the activities planned for the current lecture. In this case, the discourse particle “okay” does not preface the advent of the actual lecture. Rather, it prefaces some introductory remarks. Accordingly, this example demonstrates that the discourse particle “okay” appears at initial position to mark the beginning of the lecture.

However, other examples of the discourse particle “okay” located at initial position provide evidence for alternative explanations of its function in monologic discourse. In example 2, the discourse particle “okay” appears at initial position, but it does not collocate with any explicit utterance concerning the initiation of the lecture. Indeed, the utterance the discourse particle “okay” does appear with is strongly indicative of something else.

*Example 3: Astrophysics: Lecture 08*

*Professor: Okay, welcome to the second part of uh, of Astro 160.*

This example is taken from the first few seconds of a lecture concerning a completely new topic: black holes. Previously, the lecturer spent the last three lectures on the topic of planetary transits and how the dimming of stars is used to infer the presence of planetary objects. Although the previous three lecture titles on the syllabus concern planetary transits, the lecture title for Lecture 08 is black holes. That is, lecture 8 is a lecture about a new topic, and the discourse particle “okay” appears at initial position in this lecture. Furthermore, the lecturer begins the lecture, after the discourse particle “okay” preface, with “welcome to the second part of uh, of Astro 160,” which is a strong indication that this lecture will proceed into new territory. Accordingly, it is possible to interpret the presence of the discourse particle “okay” at initial position as indicative of something more than the mere imminent inauguration of a lecture; the presence of the discourse particle “okay” at the head of a lecture could foreshadow a new topic.

Other examples lend credence to the notion that the discourse particle “okay” adumbrates the beginning of a lecture that covers novel material. The following example is taken from a lecture that introduces a new topic in the lecture series, Peter the Great. The professor deploys the discourse particle “okay”, and then proceeds to launch into a discussion of new course material.

*Example 4: European Civilization: Lecture 04*

*Professor: Okay, I wanna talk about Peter the Great (1.0) today.*

As can be seen, the above example coincides with the advent of a new topic in the lecture and the syllabus. After the deployment of the discourse particle “okay”, the lecturer briefly introduces the topic of the current lecture. The discourse particle “okay” again collocates with the advent of a new topic and the beginning of a lecture.

Another example illustrates the same principle: the discourse particle “okay” can collocate with the beginning of a lecture covering a new topic.

*Example 5: Political Philosophy: Lecture 12*

*Professor: Okay, today, what a what a joy. What a joy. We start Hobbes. He's one of the great, he's one of the great treats.*

In the above example, the discourse particle “okay” again prefaces a lecture topical shift that collocates with a change in topic in the syllabus and actual talk. According to the syllabus, the previous lectures concerned Aristotle’s ideas of the mixed regime. The discourse particle “okay” prefaces this lecture, which concerns Hobbes and the state of nature. Furthermore, the utterance after the deployment of the discourse particle “okay” strongly indicates the advent of a new topic (“We start Hobbes”). This could be taken as further proof that the discourse particle “okay” adumbrates a lecture topic shift.

The above examples provide tentative evidence that the discourse particle “okay” projects a topic shift in the lecture material. The discourse particle “okay” appeared at initial position in lectures that covered new material, and that corresponded to new topics in the publically available syllabi. However, other examples demonstrate that the discourse particle “okay” collocates with lecture topic continuations; that is, the discourse particle “okay” can also appear at initial position in lectures that further elaborate on a previous lecture.

*Example 6: Astrophysics: Lecture 17*

*Professor: Okay, welcome back for more cosmology.*

In this example, the professor clearly indicates his intention to continue with the same topic as the previous lecture that was also about cosmology. Furthermore, the syllabus notes that the topic of the lecture is the same as the previous one. Yet the discourse particle “okay” collocates with an utterance that strong foreshadows lecture topic continuation. The function of the discourse particle “okay” in this example cannot be explained as the adumbration of new topical material. Indeed, in this example, the discourse particle “okay” only seems to mark the initiation of the lecture itself.

A further example demonstrates the propensity for the discourse particle “okay” to also collocate with lecture topic continuations. The next example is taken from a series of lectures on ancient Greek history. The previous lecture was also about the rise of the Greek Polis and Greek thought. The lecturer explicitly makes the connection between the previous lecture and the current one at the very beginning of the lecture.

*Example 7: Ancient Greek History: Lecture 05*

*Professor: Okay, we were discussing the rise of the Polis, and I was, uh, into the subject of the way the Greeks **thought**.*

As can be seen in the example above, the lecturer explicitly links the previous lecture material with the one about to begin with various signals, which include the clause “we were discussing” and the intonation prominence on the word “thought.” Example 6, like Example 5, does not presage the advent of a new lecture topic or the transition to a new section of the syllabus. Rather, it prefaces a retrospective orientation to the material in the previous lecture.

As the above examples have indicated, the discourse particle “okay” prefaces both lecture topic continuations and retrospective orientations to the previous lecture material. It’s difficult to imagine that prefacing either orientation toward the topic of the lecture is a function of the discourse particle “okay.” Indeed, it is probably best to interpret the appearance of the discourse particle “okay” at the beginning of lectures as a simple imminent initiation signal; that is, the core function of the discourse particle “okay” at initial position is to signal the imminent inauguration of the lecture.

Some additional examples will elucidate the lecture inauguration function of the discourse particle “okay.” The following example begins with the discourse particle “okay”, but the immediately following self-directed question is tentative evidence that the discourse particle “okay” indeed does not immediately preface new lecture topics or reorient to past lecture topics.

*Example 8: Political Philosophy: Lecture 08*

*Professor: Okay, where are we. To-today, we’re going to study, I’m gonna talk about Aristotle’s, you might call it Aristotle’s comparative politics. And focusing on the idea of the regime.*

In example 8, the lecturer deploys the discourse particle “okay” at initial position, which provides evidence to the hypothesis that the discourse particle “okay” adumbrates an entire lecture, irrespective of the orientation to the previous or subsequent lecture material. Indeed, the discourse particle “okay” appears at initial position in spite of the fact that the lecturer seems to have temporarily forgotten what he was going to talk about, which could be taken as further evidence that the discourse particle “okay” only adumbrates the imminent onset of the lecture rather than anything else.



#### 4.2. Deviant Case Analysis: Lectures with a discourse particle “okay” positioned after initial position

None of the above examples prove that the discourse particle “okay” directly adumbrates the imminent onset of a lecture, a type of monologic interaction. Indeed, all the evidence presented so far simply demonstrates that the deployment of the discourse particle “okay” simply correlates to the beginning of a lecture. It could be that the discourse particle “okay” has nothing to do with the inauguration of a lecture.

However, a deviant case analysis—the analysis of an example in which the discourse particle “okay” does not appear at initial position, but soon after—reveals that the function of the discourse particle “okay” is to indeed adumbrate the impending initiation of a lecture. The following example is taken from the political philosophy series of lectures. Although the lecturer does not deploy the discourse particle “okay” at anchor position, the professor does utilize the discourse particle “okay” before the beginning of the actual lecture.

*Example 9: Political Philosophy: Lecture 15*

*Professor: Uh, well, good, good morning. It's so, it's so nice to see you again, on this gorgeous, on this gorgeous autumn day. And we had a wonderful wonderful weekend, didn't we? (3.0) Yes we did. (4.0). Uhh, okay, today (3.0) I want us to begin, we move ahead, we're moving ahead. Today we begin with Mr. John Locke.*

Although the discourse particle “okay” is not located at the very beginning of the lecture, it does mark the transition between superfluous greetings along with commentary on the weather as well as the weekend and the beginning of the lecture and a new lecture topic. Before the appearance of the discourse particle “okay,” the professor greets the students, and comments on the nice weather and the weekend, which is hardly something congruent with the topic of the lecture, which according to the syllabus is the thought of John Locke. Certainly, nothing before the discourse particle “okay” concerns John Locke, the labor theory of value, or 17<sup>th</sup> century English philosophy.

After the appearance of the discourse particle “okay,” however, the professor states that “he wants to begin”, which could be construed as tentative evidence that the discourse particle “okay” foreshadows the imminent beginning of the lecture, and then states “today we begin with Mr. John Locke.” The discourse particle “okay” collocates with the first utterances that make any mention of the topic designated by the syllabus as the topic of the lecture. The discourse particle “okay” appears at exactly the border between the rather superfluous material in the beginning and the proper onset of the lecture. Hence, this example demonstrates the propensity for the discourse particle “okay” to mark the beginning of the lecture itself.

### 4.3. Lectures with a discourse particle “so” at initial position

Like the discourse particle “okay”, the discourse particle “so” also appears at initial position fairly frequently. Unlike the nebulous discourse particle “okay”, however, the discourse particle “so” seems to systematically appear at initial position to perform one function: adumbrate a retrospective orientation toward the previous lecture. That is, the appearance of the discourse particle “so” foreshadows a review of some of the previous lecture’s material. Some examples will illustrate.

The first example of the discourse particle “so” appearing at initial position is taken from an astrophysics lecture. The lecturer deploys the discourse particle “so” and then proceeds into a discussion of objects in the solar system, which was also a topic covered in the immediately preceding lecture.

*Example 10: Astrophysics: Lecture 04*

*Professor: So, we were talking last time, about uhhhh, the plan- the objects in the solar system and we'd gone through kinda two of the three stages uhh, of this scientific method as it's applied to observational science rather than to experimental science.*

As can be seen, the discourse particle “so” is deployed, and then the lecturer begins a discussion about the topic covered in the previous lecture. Therefore, the discourse particle “so” is collocated with the advent of a lecture that begins with a summation of the previous lecture. If collocation is a sign of discourse function, then the discourse particle “so” at initial position, at least in this case, seems to adumbrate the imminent summation of a topic presented in a previous lecture; that is, the discourse particle “so” foreshadows the imminent beginning of a review of previous lecture material.

Another example will illustrate this function of the discourse particle “so.” The next example is also taken from the astrophysics series of lectures. The professor deploys the discourse particle “so” at initial position, and then begins to review the previous lecture material, planetary transits.

*Example 11: Astrophysics: Lecture 07*

*Professor: So, we've been talking about transits, and you'll recall how this works. Transits. You uh get light uh blocked. Light from the star blocked by planet.*

As can be seen, the lecturer deploys the discourse particle “so” at initial position, and then proceeds to review the topic of the last class in an effort to connect it to the current class. According to the syllabus, the lecture will cover material similar to the previous lecture, so one should not be surprised that the professor began the lecture with a discourse particle that adumbrates a review of the previous lecture’s material.

#### 4.4. Deviant Case Analysis: Lectures with a discourse particle “so” positioned after initial position

Although the discourse particle “so” had a salient tendency to appear at initial position, it does not categorically appear there. In the example below, the discourse particle “so” is not located at initial position—it’s right after initial position. But the function of the discourse particle “so” does not seem to attenuate any because of the change in locale.

*Example 12: The Moral Foundations of Politics: Lecture 02*

*Professor: Okay so, let’s begin. I asked you to, to bear two questions in mind.*

Although the discourse particle “so” is not located in initial position, it still seems to indicate the imminent genesis of a retrospective orientation in the lecture. The discourse particle “so” still collocates with the retrospective orientation introduced by the clause “I asked you to, to bear two questions in mind.” Indeed, the lecturer explicitly begins the very beginning of the lecture with a review of two questions that he asked the students to answer for themselves at the end of the previous lecture; that is, the professor thematically links the assignment given at the end of the previous lecture with the beginning of current lecture. It is no accident that the discourse particle “so” appears in this lexical neighborhood. Again, if collocation indicates discourse function, then the discourse particle “so” at initial position and the discourse particle “so” close to initial position collocates with brief reviews of antecedent lecture material.

#### 4.5. Deviant Case Analysis: Lectures with neither a discourse particle “okay” nor a discourse particle “so”

Although both the discourse particle “okay” and the discourse particle “so” have a salient tendency to appear at initial position in lectures and adumbrate the onset of certain phenomenon, this is not a categorical characteristic. About 80% of the lectures did not start with either the discourse particle “okay” or the discourse particle “so.” Two examples will demonstrate this tendency.

The first example is taken from the astrophysics lecture series. The professor does not deploy any discourse marker, but he does indicate that the lecture will cover new material. Indeed the lecture series seems to have moved into a new part of the material entirely.

*Example 13: Astrophysics: Lecture 16*

*Professor: Welcome to part three of the course. Uh. This is going to be about cosmology. One of the things the most amazing thing about that’s happened over the past half century or so is*

*that cosmology, which is, uh, the study of the universe as a whole, uh, has become a scientific subject.*

The professor begins a new section of the class in example 13. A new topic is delineated on the syllabus, and the beginning of example 13 corresponds to it. The information relayed by the speaker also covers new lecture topical material. However, no discourse particle heads the lecturer's utterance. This suggests two things: the discourse particle "okay" is not indicative, at all, of an imminent topic transition in the lecture material; and that the deployment of discourse particles is completely optional. Indeed, example 3 contains almost exactly the same wording as example 13, but the discourse particle "okay" does not appear in example 13. Because the lexicon of both examples is the same, it can be deduced that the presence of the discourse particle "okay" in example 3 and the lack of the discourse particle "okay" in example 13 is due to the completely discretionary character of discourse particles.

A further example will illustrate the same. Example 14 is very similar to example 8. That is, although both examples begin with similar lexis and topic markers, example 8 is prefaced with the discourse particle "okay" and example 14 is not.

*Example 14: Political Philosophy: Lecture 02*

*Professor: Uh, today, we start, guess what, we start, we start with Plato. Plato's apology of Socrates. Uh (3.0) this is the best introductory text to the study of political philosophy.*

In the above example, the professor begins the lectures that will cover Plato's contributions to political philosophy. In example 8, the professor does exactly the same thing for Aristotle. However, example 14 does not have the discourse particle "okay" while example 8 does. This indicates that the same lecturer can do exactly the same interactional work without the presence of projective signals like discourse particles. In other words, the usage of discourse particles is discretionary; they are optional elements of language.

## **5. Discussion**

When discourse particles appear at initial position in lectures, a prototypical type of monologic interaction, they act as procedural signals to the interlocutor to interpret the information following the discourse particle according to the specified procedure. This is true in dialogic and multilogic talk as well as monologic talk.

The results of this study indicate that the discourse particle "okay" deployed at initial position

conveys a procedure to the speaker's interlocutor(s) to interpret the following information as the inauguration of the monologic interaction. Indeed, if the discourse particle "okay" is deployed later in the monologic interaction, it indicates that all material preceding the deployment of the discourse particle "okay" is superfluous to the lecture topic. However, the discourse particle "okay" is not consistently deployed at initiation points of the lectures in the data set. Rather than take that fact as evidence that the procedural meaning of the discourse particle "okay" is unrelated to monologic interaction initiations, this study claims that the lack of the discourse particle "okay" at initial position in some lectures simply demonstrates the discretionary character of discourse particles. Indeed, this interpretation is entirely consistent with even the earliest findings in discourse marker research (Schiffrin 1987). Accordingly, the discourse particle "okay" can be optionally deployed at initial position to indicate the imminent beginning of a lecture.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that the discourse particle "so" deployed at initial position conveys a procedure to the speaker's interlocutor(s) to interpret the following information as the initiation of a review of previous lecture material; that is, the discourse particle "so" at initial position adumbrates an imminent review of previous material. However, like the case with the discourse particle "okay", the discourse particle "so" is not always deployed at initial position in lectures which sum up the main points of previous lecture material before proceeding into the new lecture material. Again, like the same phenomenon with the discourse particle "okay", the optional character of discourse particles, and discourse markers, explains the presence and lack of the discourse particle "so" at initial position in lectures that begin with summations of the previous lecture's main point. Accordingly, the discourse particle "so" adumbrates the imminent onset of a summation of previous lecture material, but is not a mandated feature of language.

However, a word of caution concerning the data set is warranted. Because the video-recordings are just that—video recordings—it is possible that the first words spoken on the video were not actually the first words in the lecture itself. It must be conceded that the camera operators or the video editors might have deleted or cut certain material from the beginning of the lecture. Indeed, there is one example in which this is almost certain to be the case.

*Example 15: European Civilization: Lecture 16*

*Professor      The second announcement is that, uhm, the **movie**, the films, I've, uhm, I've done  
what I think is the way to do it.*

Example 15 begins with "the second announcement is", which most definitely indicates that the professor had a previous first announcement that was not part of the published recording. Although this is a

blatant example of poor editing, other examples in the data set suggest that editors selectively chose the starting points of the lectures. This discovery is especially problematic for this study because phenomenon such as discourse particles are sometimes considered linguistic detritus, even by renowned linguistics, so it would be no surprise to discover that some of the lecture initial discourse particles and markers were deleted during the editing process. Accordingly, the results of this study are tentative: it is probable that some of lecture videos that did not have any initial discourse particles had some before the editing process deleted them, for whatever reason. It is likely that the number of lectures that were prefaced by discourse particles is even higher than reported in this study.

## **6. Conclusion**

This research provides tentative evidence that the discourse marker “okay” projects an extended turn in monologic interaction, a possibility that was first advanced by O'Neal (2010). In a study of naturally occurring dialogic talk, O'Neal (2010) discovered that the discourse particle “okay” sometimes collocated with other signals of the imminent onset of an extended turn, which often took the form of a long stretch of monologic talk. This study provides further tentative evidence that one of the functions of the discourse particle “okay” is to adumbrate the imminent onset of a monologic interaction; that is, the discourse particle “okay” foreshadows that the turn-taking system will shut down, and one speaker will maintain control over the floor for the duration of the shutdown. Furthermore, this research provides further evidence that the discourse particle “so” at initial position in monologic interactions indicates the imminent onset of a summation of previous material, a review of what has been mentioned in other lectures. Although the discourse particle “so” has been discovered to perform a number of functions, one of its functions seems to be to adumbrate a review of previous material. Accordingly, this paper indicates a new research direction for discourse particles, one which has only been briefly touched upon by Rendle-Short (1999, 2003).

It is hoped that this paper can contribute in some small way to a better understanding of the practices required to achieve “interactional competence”, a new idea of communicative ability advanced by Celce-Murcia (2008). As “communicative competence” slowly morphs into “interactional competence”, the knowledge of the vicissitudes expressed by discourse particles and discourse markers becomes increasingly relevant. Indeed, it can be stated without reservation that interactional competence is partially dependent on an understanding of discourse particles, and it is hoped that this study advances that field a little further to

culmination.

### **\* Appendix: Conversation Analytic Transcription Symbols**

The following list of conversation analysis transcription symbols is based on the transcription symbols from Atkinson & Heritage (1984 ix-xvi).

- Simultaneous Utterances & Overlapping Utterances: simultaneous and overlapping utterances are marked with left brackets from the first point of overlap or the point of simultaneous beginning.

Simultaneous Utterances

A: How are you guys?

B: [Great

C: [Good

Overlapping Utterances

A: Happy birth[day!

B: [Thank you!

- Contiguous Utterances: When no interval is found between utterances, an equals sign is placed at the end of the first utterance and the beginning of the second utterance. This indicates that the transition between speakers was very short.

Contiguous Utterances

A: I started smoking again=

B: =You promised you wouldn't!

- Intervals within and between utterances: salient silences between utterances are noted inside parenthesis in numbers of seconds of silence.

Intervals within an utterance:

In the First Three Seconds (O'Neal)

A: When I was (3.0) eighteen years old, I went to Las Vegas for the first time.

Intervals between utterances:

A: So, what did you do last weekend?

(2.0)

B: Uh, what was that again? I couldn't hear you.

- Sound Stretches: When interactants elongate a phoneme of any sort, colons are added after the phoneme to indicate a sound stretch. Furthermore, more colons indicate a longer sound stretch.

Sound stretch:

A: I don't know::::::

- Fast Speech: When a speaker speaks with a faster than normal temp, the utterance is marked off with < and > signs.
- Kinesthetic Details of the interaction: relevant kinesthetic details (body movements, gestures, laughter, etc.) that interactants orient to are written inside double parenthesis.

Kinesthetic Details:

A: Yeah, it's a great salad ((turns eyes counter-clockwise and removes gaze from the interlocutor))

- Intonation: intonation is only marked in a few ways in conversation analysis. High rising intonation is marked with a question mark, regardless of whether the utterance is oriented to as a question or not. Low rising intonation is marked with an upside down question mark. Slight rising intonation is marked with a comma, regardless of the grammatical unit bounded by the comma. Periods indicate full intonation stops and a falling intonation. Word stresses are underlined. Sentence stresses are marked with upward arrows for rising sentence stress and downward arrows mark descending sentence stress. It must be remembered though that CA doesn't use sentences as units of analysis, so the term "sentence stress" is somewhat out of place, although the



phenomenon is certainly present in much of the interaction CA deals with.

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