



## Pragmatic Aspects of Mægær ('unless'/'but') as a Discourse Marker in Persian

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(123-146)

### Abstract

Discourse marker is a functional-pragmatic category, not affecting truth conditions of the sentence. These linguistic elements encode procedural rather than representative or propositional meanings. Discourse markers have been the subject of increasing attention in recent years, and have been investigated in different theoretical frameworks. Among the vast variety of approaches toward interpreting the role of discourse markers, one major approach is rooted in Grice's suggestion. By elaborating the concept of conventional implicature along the previously well-known concept of conversational implicature, Grice (1989) treats some discourse markers as being instances of the former. He also conceptualized the concept of non-central or higher-level speech acts to account for the contribution of these discourse markers to the meaning of their host sentence. In this article, we will initially describe the characteristics of the discourse marker "mægær" ('unless'/'but') in terms of prototypical characteristics of discourse markers proposed by Brinton (1996) and Heine (2013). We then present a diachronic exposition of its semantic development from having a propositional meaning to a word with a textual and expressive function in contemporary Persian. This explanation is in accordance with Traugott's (1982) analysis of semantic change toward more subjectification. Ultimately, we have applied a Gricean interpretation to this Persian discourse marker, as a higher-level speech act. It is argued that "mægær" ('unless'/'but'), in addition to its function as a connective element (which connects two textual units or encrypts the connection between the propositional content of an utterance and its previous context), can help with the performance of a non-central speech act with the illocutionary force of indicating opposition. Given the fact that speech acts, in Searl's terms, are the subject of the quadruple felicity conditions, namely Preparatory, Sincerity, Propositional content and Essential conditions we have shown how these conditions can be actualized (or applied) when it comes to higher-level speech acts.

**Keywords:** Discourse Marker, Conventional Implicature, Speech Act, Illocutionary Force, Felicity Conditions, Grammaticalization.

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Discourse Markers are among the most controversial subjects in Pragmatics. Not affecting truth conditions of the sentence, these linguistic elements encode procedural rather than representative or propositional meanings. There seem to be many disagreements among linguists, concerning the terminology and definition. Besides, there is no general consensus even in the set of expressions that can be concerned as instances of this term. Discourse markers have been the subject of increasing attention in recent years, and have been investigated in different theoretical frameworks. One major approach toward interpreting the role of discourse markers is rooted in Grice's works (1989). Grice subsumed some of the discourse markers under the concept of conventional implicature and as instances of what he called higher-level or non-central speech act. The significance of this approach is due to its contribution to the development of the speech act theory.

The Persian word "mægær" ('unless'/'but') has undergone different changes in meaning and role, leading to its function as a discourse marker in today's Persian. So far, there has not been any research that specifically studies "mægær", which makes the current study the first research on the various pragmatic aspects of this discourse marker. In this article, we will initially describe the characteristics of "mægær" in terms of prototypical characteristics of discourse markers proposed by Brinton (1996) and Heine (2013), in order to demonstrate the fact that this expression mostly functions as a discourse marker in contemporary Persian. In the next step, we put forward a diachronic exposition of its semantic development. Ultimately, we have applied a Gricean interpretation of this Persian discourse marker, as a higher-level speech act.

This paper aims to answer these questions: can we consider "mægær" as a discourse marker in Persian, and if it is so what are its characteristics? How can we describe "mægær" as a higher-level speech act, in Gricean terms, and what would be its illocutionary force? How we can use Searl's felicity conditions for this discourse marker?

## 2. Methodology

Based on a brief discussion about "mægær"'s characteristics, we have shown that it has almost every prototypical characteristic of discourse markers suggested by Brinton (1996) and Heine (2013). Then we put forward a diachronic exposition by comparing the various meanings of this expression in 11-13 century texts with its meaning in today Persian. For doing so, we gathered two small corpora, including 150 old usages of the word and 170 contemporary usages. We have shown that its content has changed from a propositional meaning to a textual and expressive meaning in contemporary Persian, which is in line with Traugott's (1982) analysis of semantic-pragmatic change in the early stages of grammaticalization. Lastly, it is argued that "mægær" ('unless'/'but), in addition to its function as a connective element (which connects two textual units or encrypts the connection between the propositional content of an utterance and its previous context), can help with the performance of a non-central speech act with the illocutionary force of indicating opposition. Given the fact that speech acts, in Searl's terms, are the subject of the quadruple felicity conditions, namely Preparatory, Sincerity, Propositional content, and Essential conditions we have shown how these conditions can be actualized (or applied) when it comes to higher-level speech acts.

## 3. Discussion of Results and Conclusions

Findings can be summarized in several directions. First, it was found that "mægær", a word that was made by combining the negative marker "mæ" with "ægær" (the result of grammaticalization of "hækæræm", an adverb of time), has gradually accepted a contrastive and concessive meaning. "mægær" has changed from a word with a propositional meaning (referring to a temporal situation) toward a textual function (which is helping to make a text cohesive) that is in accordance with Traugott's (1982) analysis of "while". In today's Persian, it has accepted a concessive meaning as well, which is primarily expressive of the speaker's attitudes toward the addressee or proposition itself. Second, the interrogative sentences that contain initial "mægær", besides performing a literal speech act (uttering a question) are always carrying an indirect speech act as well, emphasizing the declarative proposition that is outwardly target of a yes-no question. The gap between the secondary (literal) and the primary (indirect) speech act is bridged up with recourse to the higher-level speech act. By designating on a concessive contrast on the non-central speech act level, "mægær" helps the addressee to infer the indirect speech act on the central level. In this process (bridging the gap between primary and secondary speech act), mutual contextual beliefs have a leading role as well. Third, among the quadruple felicity conditions, namely Preparatory, Sincerity, Propositional content, and Essential conditions we have shown how these conditions can be actualized (or applied) when it comes to higher-level speech acts. To put it concisely, the conditions of propositional content and sincerity are inapplicable or irrelevant for non-central speech acts in general, but we can formulate preparatory and essential conditions for "mægær" as bellow (H stands for the hearer and S for the speaker):

Preparatory condition, it is not obvious to H that S believes there is no opposition. Essential condition, uttering the expression counts as an attempt to make an opposition between two parts of utterance or between utterance and contextual assumptions.