PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN CONTEMPORARY UZBEK: INFERENCE, REFORMULATION AND INTERPERSONAL STANCE

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Abstract. This article examines the pragmatic functions of selected discourse markers in contemporary Uzbek, focusing on axir, demak, xullas and balki. It distinguishes the lexical or conventional contribution of each item from the interactional effects created by its placement in an utterance. Through qualitative examination of purpose-built conversational examples, the study describes how markers may appeal to shared knowledge, announce inference, summarize previous discourse or maintain epistemic openness. A comparison of minimal contexts indicates that the interpretation of a marker depends on intonation, sequential position, interpersonal relationship and the proposition it frames. The examples are analytical constructions rather than naturally sampled corpus evidence; no quantitative claims are made. The proposed framework supports further corpus-based research and advanced Uzbek-language instruction.

Keywords: Uzbek linguistics, discourse markers, pragmatics, inference, reformulation, stance, interaction.

INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers are small linguistic resources with considerable interactional consequences. Speakers use them to connect clauses, orient listeners toward an inference, signal a change of footing or guide the interpretation of a preceding proposition. In Uzbek these functions are distributed across words commonly classified in traditional descriptions as particles, modal words, connective expressions or introductory elements. A rigid division by word class may therefore obscure the ways in which an item works in a specific sequence of talk.

The present article examines four widely recognizable Uzbek forms: axir, demak, xullas and balki. They were chosen because they illustrate different points along the interface of pragmatic procedure, epistemic stance and discourse organization. Axir may present a proposition as a consideration the listener should already appreciate; demak can project an inference; xullas frequently frames a summary or closure; balki maintains a possible alternative or tentative interpretation. These glosses are provisional and cannot be treated as full dictionaries of usage.

The objective is to formulate a transparent qualitative account of what learners and researchers must examine before assigning a discourse function to a token. The central questions are whether a marker changes propositional content, what discourse relation it invokes, and how its placement affects the speaker's stance toward an interlocutor. The study focuses on contemporary standard Uzbek presented in Latin orthography and does not claim to represent every dialect or register.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Schiffrin (1987) established an influential account of discourse markers as resources coordinating different planes of discourse, including ideational organization and social interaction. Fraser (1999) emphasizes the pragmatic relationships markers signal between discourse segments. These traditions differ in their definitions but both caution against interpreting an item from its isolated lexical meaning alone.

Brinton (1996) relates pragmatic markers to language change and the organization of spoken discourse, while Aijmer (2002) demonstrates the analytical usefulness of contextual, corpus-sensitive approaches. Traugott and Dasher (2002) describe how expressions can develop new meanings through invited inferences and conventionalization. For languages with rich particle systems, this perspective suggests asking how recurrent conversational uses become associated with specific procedural expectations.

Research on Uzbek has increasingly approached markers as a functional set extending across conventional grammatical categories. Islomova (2026) explicitly identifies terminological diversity as a difficulty in comparing English and Uzbek descriptions. Üzüm (2023), while concentrating on the inferential marker chog‘i, demonstrates the need to relate grammatical form to contextual evidence and epistemic interpretation. These contributions are relevant even though the four items examined here are not all evidential expressions.

A useful distinction is between textual organization and interpersonal negotiation. A reformulation cue may primarily indicate how one segment should be related to another, yet that relation can also soften disagreement or manage a transition between speakers. Conversely, a stance particle can influence whether the next response is heard as agreement, resistance or a request for explanation. Such cross-functional behavior makes contextual analysis indispensable.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The article employs qualitative semantic-pragmatic interpretation and controlled contrast. It uses eight purpose-built micro-dialogues and a set of paraphrases to isolate plausible functions of the four selected markers. The examples were written for linguistic illustration; they are not transcriptions of recorded conversations, elicited native-speaker judgments or a statistically representative corpus. All English translations are interpretive approximations rather than formal interlinear glosses.

Analysis proceeds in five steps. First, the core proposition is restated without the marker. Second, the discourse context is described, including shared knowledge and previous turns. Third, the marker's position is identified: utterance-initial, clause-internal or closing. Fourth, possible effects on expectation, inference or politeness are compared. Finally, alternatives are acknowledged, especially where intonation or a prior utterance could motivate a different reading.

Because Uzbek intonation is not encoded reliably in ordinary orthography, the illustrative exchanges cannot establish the full prosodic profile of any marker. They instead show how a hypothesis about function can be formulated and then tested in future annotated corpora. The analytical unit is the marker-in-context rather than the word treated in isolation.

RESULTS AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

1. Axir and appeals to accessible knowledge. Consider the constructed exchange: A: Nega qaytmadingiz? (Why did you not return?) B: Axir yo‘l yopiq edi. (But the road was closed, as you know / after all, the road was closed.) Without axir, B merely supplies an explanation. With the marker, B may additionally invite A to treat the road closure as a sufficiently obvious or already accessible reason. The stance may sound defensive, corrective or cooperative depending on voice quality and common ground.

A second possible environment is Axir men aytdim-ku! (But I told you!). Here axir occurs with the emphatic particle -ku, suggesting that the combined construction matters more than the marker alone. It would be misleading to conclude that axir inherently expresses irritation. In a reassuring exchange the same appeal to known information could help create solidarity. The analytical question is what information the speaker presents as shared, not whether an emotional label can be attached universally.

2. Demak and inferential progression. In the invented sequence A: Bugun barcha xonalar band. (All rooms are occupied today.) B: Demak, uchrashuvni ertaga o'tkazamiz. (So, we will hold the meeting tomorrow.) demak connects a prior premise to a practical conclusion. Deleting it leaves the plan intelligible, but weakens the explicit

display of inferential dependence. Demak can introduce a paraphrase, a decision or an interpretation of another person's statement rather than a strictly deductive conclusion.

The provisional distinction between inference and summary can be tested by changing the prior discourse. After a lengthy discussion of two conflicting proposals, Demak, ikkita variant qoldi (So, two options remain) may both summarize and project a consequence. This overlap shows why one token may carry more than one discourse-organizing function. In formal written Uzbek the same item may be read as a logical connective, while conversation can supply negotiation of a proposed interpretation.

3. Xullas and discourse closure. In an illustrative dialogue, A gives several details about a delayed journey and concludes: Xullas, kechikdik. (In short, we were late.) Xullas announces that the speaker is condensing the preceding account to a locally relevant outcome. Its presence may also signal that the speaker is about to relinquish the floor or redirect attention to a decision. The marker does not always mean that the broader conversation ends: a listener can respond with a question reopening the narrative.

In another constructed utterance, Xullas, reja o'zgarmaydi (To sum up, the plan remains unchanged), the apparent summary can perform an institutional act by closing negotiation. The interpersonal effect, however, derives from role, setting and prior turns, not exclusively from the word. To analyze such cases responsibly, researchers must distinguish the observable sequential move from an assumed attitude of authority.

4. Balki and the maintenance of alternatives. The sentence Balki u ertaga kelar (Perhaps he or she will come tomorrow) presents the event as a possibility rather than a categorical forecast. In a dialogue A: U kelmaydi. (He or she will not come.) B: Balki kelar. (Perhaps they will.), balki may also contest the certainty of the preceding prediction without a direct categorical contradiction. The marker thereby supports epistemic openness and potentially reduces interpersonal friction.

Balki can also form an explicit alternative, as in Balki boshqa yo'lni tanlarmiz (Perhaps we should choose another route). Its function should not be reduced to politeness, since a speaker may use a tentative form strategically or simply because evidence is incomplete. A full account requires attention to clause type, prosody and social relation, and to whether the alternative is an assertion, suggestion or question.

5. Contrasting organization and stance. The four markers do not occupy mutually exclusive functional boxes. Demak and xullas can both follow a long explanation, but the former often projects what follows from it whereas the latter frequently compresses it. Axir and balki may both modify interpersonal alignment, yet one can prompt an interlocutor to recognize familiar grounds while the other keeps a competing possibility available. These contrasts are hypotheses about plausible readings, not frequency-based generalizations.

The comparison also shows that English translation is hazardous. 'After all', 'so', 'in short' and 'perhaps' can be useful glosses, but their distribution and politeness effects do not map directly onto Uzbek. Researchers should attach a brief context to translations and avoid claiming a one-to-one structural equivalence. In teaching, students can compare how changing an utterance's prior turn changes its pragmatic reading.

DISCUSSION

The analysis supports a layered description of Uzbek discourse markers. The lexical layer identifies the conventional form; the relational layer determines how utterances are linked; and the interactional layer identifies how a speaker projects accountability, alignment or uncertainty. Treating these layers separately avoids the common error of attributing an entire conversational effect to one word. It also makes cross-linguistic comparison more precise, because different languages may distribute the same interactional work across particles, intonation and syntax.

For research design, the immediate next step is corpus validation. A balanced dataset should distinguish informal conversations, interviews, online discussion and institutional speech. Annotation could record token position, preceding discourse relation, co-occurring particles, punctuation or prosody, and the likely response invited

by a marker. Independent annotators would then test whether proposed labels can be applied consistently. This would permit careful frequency analysis without assuming that constructed examples describe actual prevalence.

The pedagogical relevance lies in moving beyond vocabulary substitution. Students should first recognize the literal proposition, then compare two contextually plausible versions and explain the listener's likely interpretation. Activities can involve supplying a preceding turn, rearranging a marker within a clause and discussing how an English gloss changes. Such work encourages pragmatic awareness and illustrates that grammatical correctness and conversational appropriateness are related but distinct outcomes.

This study remains limited by its deliberately constructed material. It has not tested acceptability judgments, surveyed regional dialects or measured prosodic realizations. Its contribution is an explicitly testable framework for analyzing functional contrasts in Uzbek, not a claim of a newly established empirical distribution.

CONCLUSION

The Uzbek markers axir, demak, xullas and balki illustrate the intersection of inference, discourse sequencing and interpersonal stance. Contextual contrasts indicate that axir may activate an appeal to shared grounds, demak can make inferential dependence salient, xullas can frame a summary or closure, and balki can keep alternatives open. None of these functions should be treated as automatic in every occurrence. A reliable account requires simultaneous attention to the proposition, the preceding turn, the speaker's epistemic commitment and the interactional context. The proposed qualitative method provides an analytical starting point for corpus work and for advanced instruction in Uzbek pragmatics. Future research should test the scheme using authentic annotated interaction and independent speaker judgments.

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