The syntax of speech acts. Evidence from Confirmational

In this talk I explore the form, function, and distribution of discourse markers such as *eh, huh, etc.* which appear to be outside the clause as in (1). They typically appear at the right periphery of the clause and they are restricted to root clauses, as shown in (2).

(1)  
*You have a new dog, (eh, huh, hey, right, yeah, ...) ?*  
= Confirm that it's true that you have a new dog.

(2)  
*Anne knows that you have a new dog, (eh, huh, hey, right, yeah, ...) ?*  
= Confirm that it's true that Anne knows that you have a new dog.  
≠ Confirm that it's true that you have a new dog.

As discourse markers they play an important role in common ground management: they are used to request confirmation from the addressee (hence I refer to them as **confirmational**). Confirmational differ according to what the addressee is expected to confirm. In (1) the addressee is asked to confirm that the proposition is true while in (2) the addressee is asked to confirm that s/he knows that the proposition is true. In this second context only a subset of the discourse markers is felicitous as summarized in table 1.

(3)  
*I have a new dog, (eh, hey, ...) ?*  
= Confirm that you know I have a new dog.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><em>eh</em></th>
<th><em>hey</em></th>
<th><em>huh</em></th>
<th><em>right</em></th>
<th><em>yeah</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confirm that it's true</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm that you know</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>⊗</td>
<td>⊗</td>
<td>⊗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The distribution of discourse markers

To account for this source of variation I propose an updated version of Ross' (1970) performative hypothesis according to which the utterance of a clause is embedded in some higher structure which determines the speech act (see also Speas & Tenny 2003). In particular I propose that discourse markers may either attach at the propositional level (yielding confirmation of truth) or else at the speech act level (yielding confirmation that the speech act of assertion is appropriate). This is summarized in figure 1.

![Figure 1: different combinatorial properties of discourse markers](image)

In this talk I explore the predictions of this neo-performative hypothesis and its implications for the syntax-pragmatics interface. Evidence will include i) word-order (discourse markers show strict word order effects); ii) scope; iii) sentence intonation; iv) lexicalization patterns; and v) cross-linguistic variation.