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“The articles presented in this volume are the proceedings of the fourth workshop on formal approaches to discourse particles and modal adverbs, which took place in Ljubljana in August 2011.

Discourse particles form a borderline case between semantics and pragmatics, and can thus be the source of new insights in both domains. Usually, the formal description of the meaning of discourse particles involves more dimensions than what is usually taken into account in semantic description. Therefore, their study gives clues about the articulation between various layers of meaning, especially given that the combination of discourse particles is possible, but not in an arbitrary manner.

A proper account of the meaning of discourse particles is also a very promising avenue for computational linguistics since they are precious indicators for the disambiguation of discourse structure and speaker intentions.

Probably one of the biggest challenges in the study of discourse particles is that of variety. First, the meanings conveyed by discourse particles cover a wide range of interpretations and effects. Among other things, discourse particles can convey intensification and emotivity, affect speech acts, bear on informational structure aspects or constrain the structure of the discourse they are used in.

Another domain of great variation is that of the differences between languages. While some languages lexicalize a great number of particles (e. g. Japanese and German) others are much poorer in this domain, and between languages that do have discourse particles, the lexicalized meanings greatly differ.

Finally, the formal approaches used to characterize properly the meaning of discourse particles also prove very varied and go from dynamic semantics to decision theory, quite often borrowing from several trends.

All the papers presented in this volume are representative of this variety.” (Hogeweg, McCready, Winterstein. SDV Vol. 35.2/2011 & 36.1/2012, Editorial.)

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