Spoken discourse marking

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TextLink
Structuring Discourse in Multilingual Europe

Linguistic complexity and mode of communication

❖ 'Speech is structureless' or simpler than written grammar (e.g. Chafe 1982) is a myth (Halliday 1987).

❖ Written and oral texts are produced and processed differently and thus exhibit a different kind of complexity:

  ❖Written language is lexically dense but grammatically 'simple'

  ❖Speech is grammatically intricate but lexically sparse

    "speech [is] processlike, intricate, with meanings related serially" (Halliday 1987: 79-80)

❖ DMs exhibit a different behaviour depending on:

  • Mode of communication (MoD) [oral / written]

  • Planning   [fragmentation / integration], implying possibility of revision /formality

  • Interactivity   [involvement / detachment]

    "The term *mode of communication* must be understood in a wide sense: mode is not only or mainly the medium, but the contextual factors attached to it." (Halliday 1987)

Mode of communication and the use of DMs

Biber (2006) *University language: A Corpus-Based Study of Spoken and Written Registers*:

❖Linking adverbials, such as *however, therefore, for example, that is* are found in both spoken and written registers but are primarily characteristic of written registers, mainly textbooks.

❖"Discourse markers" (such as *ok, well, now*) are "restricted primarily to spoken discourse" (2006:66).

Castellà (2004) *Oralitat i escriptura. Dues cares de la complexitat del llenguatge.*

❖Informal conversation includes more DMs than written genres.

❖ Oral expository prose [planned formal oral text] is more similar to written prose in the use of conjunctions as text connectives, but to informal conversation in the use of other DMs.

❖The variety of connectives is more reduced in oral genres, but they are more polyfunctional.

❖ Some DMs or functions seem to be characteristic of one type of discourse.

General approaches to DMs in speech (vs. written texts): López Serena & Borreguero (2010), Cuenca (2013).

Relevant features: Text structure

(a) Structures containing DMs in speech/unplanned discourse are often truncated –the second segment is missing or is not complete (1)– or independent –the main clause is implicit (2)–, whereas in written/planned discourse the structures tend to be continuous and complete.

(1) ANI [jo és que abans] el duia llarg no/(.. 0.59)   me, it is just that before I had it long, right?
llavors si me'l volia allisar tenia que anar a la peluqueria\   so if I wanted to have my hair straightened
     I had to go to the hairdresser

[{(??) **perquè clar**\}]   **perquè clar 'because of course'**…
NIA (... 1.16) [p(e)rò el rissat és] teu/ (COC, 17-320)   but your hair is wavy

(2) ANI jo no me'l podia allisar\ (.. 0.95)   I couldn't straighten it on my own.
{(AC) p(e)rò ara xx--} **com que el porto curt ara__**   But now, **since it's short now**…
(.. 0.46) i dic me'l faré un dia\ (COC: 325-328)   and I say I'll have it done one day

(b) Structures containing DMs in speech/unplanned discourse often display long distance relationships:

(3) [a] causa de_ tota la evo-- -- la evolució de:ls_ homes_ durant_ milers i milers d'anys_ (.. 0.77) doncs_   **com que** ja antigame:nt_ quan_ vivien a les cave:rnes i tot això_ (. 0.26) **els homes_ es dedicaven a unes tasques_ i les dones es dedicaven a unes altres**_ els homes es dedicaven a sortir a caçar_ (.. 0.42) posem\ (.. 0.68) i llavors havien de córrer\ i havien de:_ (.. 0.22) de:_ perseguir els animals\ i havien de llança:r_ (.. 0.54) e:_ la llança\ (. 0.24) no sé amb què caçarien\ p(e)rò bueno\ havien de llançar la llança_ (.. 0.54) e:_ i havien d'aconseguir que:_ (.. 1.02) matar l'animal\ tirar-l'hi a una força:_ apropiada\ i a la distància apropiada\ doncs perquè:_ dongués a l'animal i es morís\ (.. 0.33)   perquè si no no menjaven\ (.. 0.32) doncs llavors_ **el seu cervell_ es va desunvolupar_ de forma_ doncs que_ la capacitat espacial_ diguem\ està molt més desenvolupada que a les dones**\ (CAP, C2CA16SS)

Since men have been in charge of some tasks and women of some others ₍cause₎ **[+ 18 segments]**
their brains evolved so that men's space ability has developed much more than women's ₍effect₎

Annotation:

  a) 'p DM 0' must be considered as a structural possibility.

  b) Longer excerpts must be taken into consideration. Simplified paraphrases can be used to identify the core structure.

Relevant features: DMs meaning

(c) The meaning of DMs in speech/unplanned discourse is often not clearly definable or it is intermediate or (semantically and pragmatically) ambiguous, as opposed to the main tendency in written/planned discourse.

(4) ANI [jo és que abans] el duia llarg no/ (.. 0.59)   me, (it) is (just) that before I had it long, right?
llavors si me'l volia allisar   **llavors 'so/and'** if I wanted to have my hair straight,
tenia que anar a la peluqueria\   I had to go to the hairdresser (COC: 317-318)

(5) Ustedes, por primera vez en la historia, han congelado las pensiones de nuestros pensionistas. **Pues** yo anuncio aquí que yo no voy a congelar las pensiones de los pensionistas…
     For the first time in history, you have frozen the retirement pension of our pensioners. **Pues 'well'**, I announce here that I will not freeze the pensions of pensioners... (Debate)

Cat. *llavors* 'so': propositional (consequence) or structural (continuity- theme/rheme)? Or both?
Sp. *pues* 'so/well': contrast? external consequence? continuity?

(d) DMs in speech/unplanned discourse tend to be polyfunctional (Hansen 2008, Hummel 2012), whereas in written/planned discourse they have a specific function.

(7) Per nosaltres, Catalunya és una nació, per història, per cultura, per tradició, una nació diversa **i** plural per les aportacions de la història més recent (Debat)
     For us, **Catalonia is** a nation because of history, culture, tradition, **a diverse *and₁* pluralistic nation** because of its contribution to recent history.

(8) ANI com que el porto curt ara_   since it's short now…
(.. 0.46) **i** dic me'l faré un dia\ (COC: 327-328)   **And₂** I say I'll have it done one day

i 'and': *and₁* (propositional/addition)   *and₂* (structural/(sub)topic change)

Annotation:

  c) 'Ambiguous' and double marking must be allowed.

  d) Some DM can act at different levels, e.g. Cat. *però*/Sp. *pero* 'but', Cat. *i*/Sp. *y* 'and' can implement propositional and non-propositional meanings. The 'one form-one function' principle seldom applies. Specific disambiguating criteria should be established.

Relevant features: DMs use

(e) Considering that DMs can act have propositional functions –indicating a logico-semantic relationship–, but also non-propositional functions – mainly structural –, and that some DMs have a modal value – indicating an (inter)subjective feature– :

■ Propositional DMs in speech/unplanned (oral) discourse are frequent but not as varied as in written/planned discourse. The markers used tend to be the basic ones (ex. 1, 2, 3: *perquè, com que*).

■ Structural functions are more frequent in speech, sp. in genres in which planning is low (9). These functions are not generally taken into account –or not systematically- in discourse relations taxonomies.

■ Modal functions are more frequent in genres in which interactivity is more prominent (dialogue) (10). Modal markers introducing units of talk are typically oral (e.g. *bueno* 'well', a *veure* 'let's see', *mira* 'look').

(9) E: **y luego aparte**// los días de religión///   **y luego aparte 'and then, additionally'**, the days of religion
pues tenías que- te mandaban religión   **pues 'well'**, they made you... religion
te mandaban yo qué sé/   they made you, I don't know
te mandaban buscar capítulos   they made you look for chapters
para que- para aprender a man- a manejarla   to learn how to use it [the Bible] (Val.Es.Co)

(10) NIA (.. 0.72) ja en saps d'allisar ja/   do you *ja* ('really') know how to straighten it, ja 'eh'?
MAM [s::\] ((mou el cap amunt i avall))   Yea...[she nods]
ANI [**és que** em] fa-- ((ANI està refredada))   **és que** ('(it) is (just) that') I'm looking… [she has a cold]
(.. 0.61) (INH) fa molta il·lu portar-lo llis\   I'm looking forward to having it straight (COC: 305-309)

(f) DMs in oral unplanned discourse frequently co-occur with other markers (Bazzanella 2001, Cuenca & Marín 2009, Dostie 2013, Fraser 2013).

(11) En la vida hay muchas contingencias desfavorables que devienen en injusticia **y, por tanto,** debemos ocuparnos de ellas. (Debate)
     In life there are many unfavorable contingencies which become injustice **and, therefore,** we must deal with them.

Ex. (3) *doncs com que* ('so since'), *i llavors* ('and then'), *però bueno* ('but anyway'), *doncs perquè* ('so because'), *perquè, si no* ('because otherwise'), *doncs llavors* ('so then'), *de forma doncs que* ('so then that')

Annotation:

  e) Domains and functions tend to mix in a single marker or combination.
    -Structural and modal functions should be systematically identified and classified.
    -A single marker can integrate two (or more) functions (e.g. *és que* introduces a modal cause).

  f) DMs co-occurrences should be differentiated and systematically annotated:
    juxtaposition [x]ₐ [y]ᵦ   e.g.: *doncs* ₍theme/rheme₎ *com que*₍cause₎ ('so since')
    addition [x, y]ₐ₊ᵦ   e.g.: *perquè, si no* ₍cause+contrast₎ ('because otherwise')
    combination [x, y]ₐ   e.g.: *però bueno* ₍topic interruption₎ ('but anyway')

Conclusions

Annotation instructions should be adapted/formulated according to the specificities of DMs in speech in a systematic and comprehensive way

❖ The structure of speech is linearly intricate, is lexically more vague and includes more repetition than written discourse.

  • Truncated/independent clauses and long distance relationships pose a challenge to the interpretation of meaning and thus to annotation.

  • Intermediate or ambiguous cases (lexical vagueness) as for the function of the DMs are often found.

❖ Some degree of DMs specialization as for MoD can be verified. Some are typically oral and others are typical of written texts. 'Oral' markers are more difficult to characterize and thus to annotate.

❖ DMs in speech tend to:

  ❖ be (more) polyfunctional and (pragmatically) ambiguous

  ❖ co-occur and form different types of combinations

  ❖ express non-propositional functions (i.e. structural and /or modal roles).

Structural and modal functions and combinations must be correctly identified and included in annotation taxonomies.

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