Linguistic complexity and mode of communication

- Speech is structureless or simpler than written grammar (e.g. Chafe 1982) is a myth (Halliday 1987: 79-80).
- 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’ processable, intricate, with meanings related socially (Halliday 1987: 79-80).

DMs exhibit a different behaviour depending on:

- Modality of communication (MoD) (oral/written)
- Phrasing [fragmentation/integration], implying possibility of revision formality
- 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 oh, well, now) are ‘restricted primarily to spoken discourse’ (2006:66).
- 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.


Relevant features: DM 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.
- Example: (1) ANI (.. 0.72) ja en saps d'allar ja/ (CAP, C2CA16SS)
- Example: (2) ANI (.. 0.72) ja en saps d’allar ja/ (CAP, C2CA16SS)

(b) Structures containing DMs in speech/unplanned discourse often display long distance relationships:
- Example: (3) ANI (.. 0.72) ja en saps d’allar ja/ (CAP, C2CA16SS)
- Example: (4) ANI (.. 0.72) ja en saps d’allar ja/ (CAP, C2CA16SS)

(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.
- Example: (5) Ustedes, por primera vez en la historia, han congelado las pensiones de nuestros pensionistas.
- Example: (6) Ustedes, por primera vez en la historia, han congelado las pensiones de nuestros pensionistas.

Relevant features: DMs meaning

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

- Some degree of DMs specialization as for MoD can be verified. Some are typically oral and others are typical of written texts.
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