



Definitions of Discourse Markers and their Functions as Discourse- Relational Devices

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Definition: Options

For defining DMs, what options do we have?

- formal properties of DMs
- functional properties of DMs
- combinations of formal and functional properties

What makes definition such an issue? Where is the problem?





Multifunctionality of DMs

<PS1SD>: put the K down right away so we'll keep that there. Now we're only bothered about the X. I differentiated something and I finished up with X what did I start from? What would you differentiate that would give you X? ...

<PS1SE>: Erm ... X squared.

<PS1SD>: **Okay** but that will give us too much





Multifunctionality of DMs

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<PS1SD>: **Okay** but that will give us too much

- **topic continuity**: D relates relevantly to the previous utterance
- **contact, perception, understanding**: D has perceived, heard and understood E's utterance
- **acceptance of contribution**: D accepts E's contribution
- **interpersonal function**: by accepting E's contribution, D signals general acceptance of E



Problem for Definition 1:

Individual discourse marker occurrences fulfill several different functions at the same time





The polyfunctionality of DMs

fmjm_3_03: okay, the third sounds good (...) sounds like a date, how 'bout you, is that good?

mdrd_3_04: **yeah**, it's excellent.

fsma_7_03: well, Wednesday I'm busy all days, Tuesday the only time I would have would be at three in the afternoon.

fmmm_7_04: **yeah**, I'll be busy on Tuesday from two to four thirty, so maybe we should make it for next week sometime?

mdkr_5_01: **yeah**, Cindy, there's a couple of more things I'd like to discuss with you. um can we get together for a couple of hours this week or next?



The polyfunctionality of *yeah*

fmjm_3_03: okay, the third sounds good (...) sounds like a date, how 'bout you, is that good?

mdrd_3_04: **yeah**, it's excellent.

answer

fsma_7_03: well, Wednesday I'm busy all days, Tuesday the only time I would have would be at three in the afternoon.

fmmm_7_04: **yeah**, I'll be busy on Tuesday from two to four thirty, so maybe we should make it for next week sometime?

uptake

mdkr_5_01: **yeah**, Cindy, there's a couple of more things I'd like to discuss with you. um can we get together for a couple of hours this week or next?

framer



Problem for Definition 2:

Individual discourse markers may fulfill several different functions in different contexts





Grammaticalization of DMs

Typically, DMs develop...

- from objective to subjective (Traugott 1995, Brinton 2005, Lewis 2006)
 - e.g. from clause internal adverbials to sentence adverbials to discourse markers (Traugott 1995)
- “start out having a propositional function, and only achieve discourse marking functions over time” (Mosegaard Hansen 1998: 237)



Problem for Definition 3:

Historically, discourse marker uses and their propositional counterparts are related





Cross-linguistic comparison

- **languages may have different preferences for the realization of DM functions, concerning**
 - size (e.g. particles in one language vs. large prefabs in another)
 - position (initial, medial, final)
 - what functions are expressed (e.g. marking an utterance as argumentatively non-initial)





Problem for Definition 4:

Definitions may only apply to the DMs of one particular language





Definition: Functional Criteria

advantage

problems

discourse marking is already a functional description

no common, unifying function for all DMs

avoids formal criteria

leaves much room, e.g. could include:

- non-verbal behaviors, gestures
- pauses/hesitation/syllable lengthening, restarts
- layout
- ...

‘bleached’ semantics

but some have ideational meanings

makes the field appear chaotic

risk of circularity



Definition: Formal criteria

typically...

problems

size: small

but also speech routines (*you know, I mean, at the risk of repeating myself*), cross-linguistic differences

uninflected

common: imperatives (*look*)

syntactically and prosodically
unintegrated

but also integrated

initial

but also medial and final



Definition: Form + Function

advantage

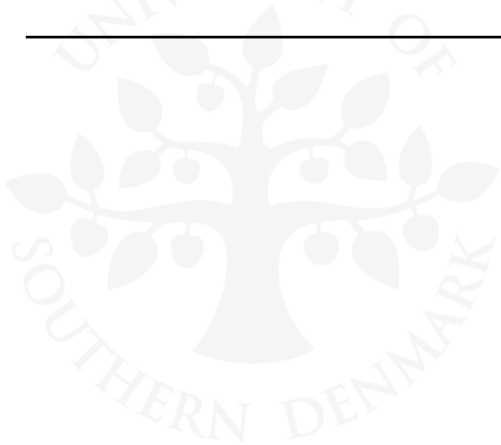
practical

restricts the range of items
considered

problems

but possibly distinctions drawn are
too early

but the selection may be *ad hoc*,
from a communicative perspective
even random





Interim Summary:

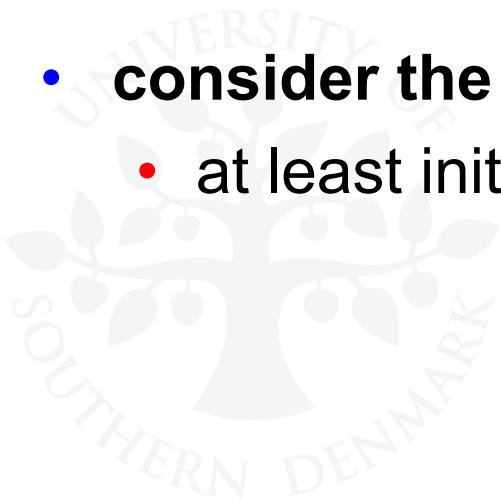
Drawing distinctions between subclasses of discourse markers ignores the flexibility of the relationships between these classes, makes cross-linguistic comparison difficult and prevents an understanding of how discourse markers develop





What we need

- **systematicity**
 - understand the variation
 - find a systematic approach to cross-linguistic differences
 - separate out the contributions of the resources that play a role in their interpretation
- **consider the whole spectrum of items and uses**
 - at least initially





Explaining the variation

Dimensions of variation

- *integrated – unintegrated*
- whether or not a DM is integrated into the sentence structure seems to make a considerable difference in function





Explaining the variation

Dimensions of variation

- *integrated – unintegrated*
 - *cotext-dependent – dependent on utterance situation*
- the degree with which the meaning/function of the DM relies on the co-text or on aspects of the communicative situation seems to make a considerable difference in function



Explaining the variation

Dimensions of variation

- ***integrated – unintegrated***
 - ***cotext-dependent – dependent on utterance situation***
 - ***connective function – discourse management***
- the degree with which a DM has a text-connecting function or a function concerning discourse management seems to coincide with the two other dimensions



Explaining the variation

Dimensions of variation

- *integrated – unintegrated*
 - *cotext-dependent – dependent on utterance situation*
 - *connective function – discourse management*
 - *written/monological – spoken/dialogical*
- whether a DM is used in pre-meditated, monological or written language or in online produced, spoken, dialogical language seems to make a considerable difference in function



Explaining the variation

Dimensions of variation

- *integrated – unintegrated*
- *cotext-dependent – dependent on utterance situation*
- *connective function – discourse management*
- *written/monological – spoken/dialogical*

- together, the four dimensions help
 - characterize DM occurrences,
 - understand the variation, breadth and heterogeneity of the field, and
 - identify correlations



Example

in German, relatively clear distinctions between

- **conjunctions**
 - integrated into sentence structure, fulfill connecting functions on the ideational level
- **modal particles**
 - integrated into sentence structure, relate the host utterance to a pragmatically given proposition
- **discourse particles**
 - small, unintegrated, fulfill discourse management functions



Role of Position

prefield	front field	1 st verbal field (finite)	middle field	2 nd verbal field (infinite parts of the predicate)	end field	post field
<i>also</i>	<i>also</i>		<i>also</i>			<i>also</i>
<i>ja</i>			<i>ja</i>			<i>ja?</i>





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discourse particle



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conjunction

discourse particle



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conjunction

discourse particle

modal particle



German Conjunctions

conjunctions:

- prosodically and syntactically integrated (even change the word order in subclauses)
- mostly connecting functions and ideational meanings
- occur in written/monologic/pre-meditated text as well as in spoken discourse

(Diewald 2006, 2016)





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- mostly connecting functions and ideational meanings
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❖ however, newer developments:

- main clause word order, prosodically not integrated, refer to speech act meanings

❖ specific formats with specific interactional functions



German Conjunctions

example *weil* [because] (e.g. Gohl & Günthner 1999; Günthner 2008; Freywald 2010): “*weil* – so reden doch alle!” (but also: *obwohl*, *wobei*, *während*)

example *ob* [if/whether] (Imo 2015): analysis of conversational data and text messages

- significant attraction of particular matrix verbs for (the most frequent) object-*ob* sentences combined with specific pragmatic functions:
 - verbs of knowledge, almost exclusively in 1st person singular: “*ich weiß nicht, ob...*” or “*ich wollte nur wissen, ob*” -> accounts
 - verbs of asking, often in conditional II: “*ich wollte fragen, ob*”, “*du hattest doch gefragt, ob*” -> pre-requests; “*die Frage ist, ob*” -> ‘projector construction’
 - verbs of decision making: “*mal gucken, ob*” -> vagueness



German Modal Particles

modal particles:

- prosodically and syntactically integrated into the sentence
- clear middle field position
- occur in spoken/dialogical situations
- function: to connect the current utterance to a pragmatically available proposition and thus to mark the utterance as non-initial

❖ however,

- ❖ also occurrences in NPs
- ❖ the sentence type of the host utterance plays a considerable role



German Modal Particles

modal particles:

- function to relate the current utterance to a pragmatically given proposition
- and thus to mark it as non-initial w.r.t. the argumentative background
- provide an answer to the question ‘why this utterance here now?’ (cf. Nemo 2006)
- evoke a logical variant of the host utterance (cf. Foolen 1989)



Diewald/Fischer Model

The model basically combines three elements:

- the proposition in the common ground that is being evoked
- the current proposition to be expressed
- the resulting utterance with the particle

e.g. for the German MP *ja*:

pragmatically given proposition: das ist schön. (this is nice)

current situation: das ist schön. (this is nice)

->

das ist *ja* schön. (this is PRT nice)



German Modal Particles

das ist **ja** schön! (*yeah this is nice*)

- reiterates an assumption in common ground: *this is nice*

das ist **aber** schön! (*this is nice after all*)

- contradicts an assumption in common ground: *this is not nice*

das ist **doch** schön! (*this is nice indeed*)

- confirms one of two alternative assumptions in common ground: *is this nice or not?*



German Discourse Particles

discourse particles:

- prosodically and syntactically unintegrated
- pre-front field position, final position or medial (repair markers, hesitation markers etc.)
- occur only in spoken/dialogical situations
- functions related to the management of discourse, e.g.
 - signaling contact, perception, understanding
 - signaling topic structure
 - signaling discourse boundaries
 - managing interpersonal relationships
 - signaling agreement



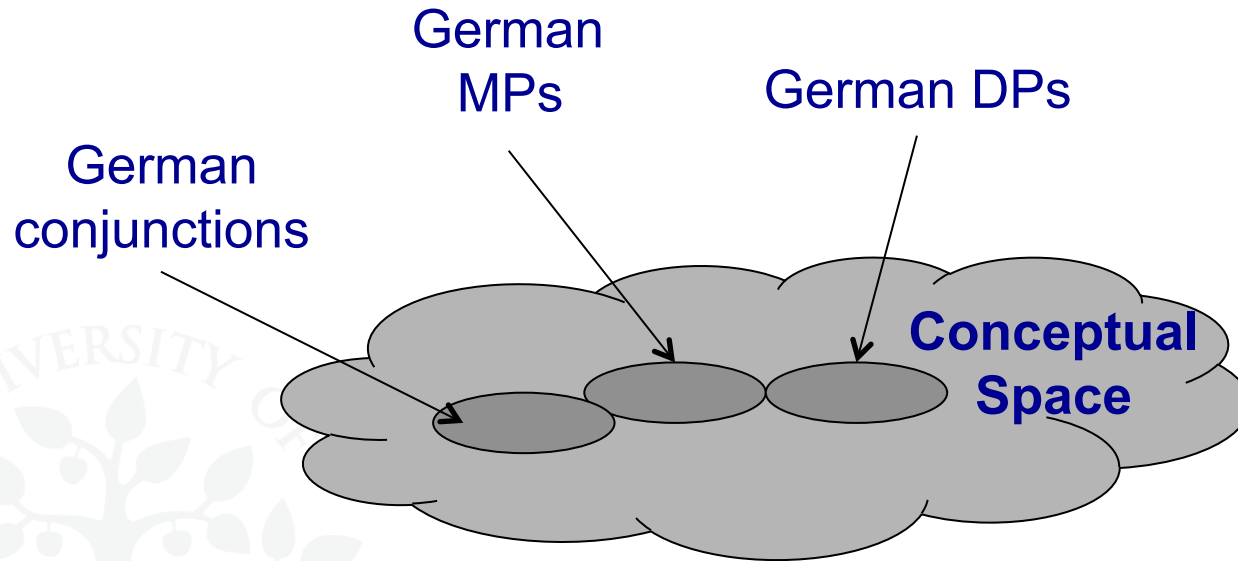
Interim Summary:

In German, there is generally a nice division of labor:

- The functions conjunctions fulfill concern the relationship of the current utterance with aspects of the co-text
- The functions modal particles fulfill concern the anchoring of the host utterance in previous discourse
- The functions discourse particles fulfill concern the management of discourse

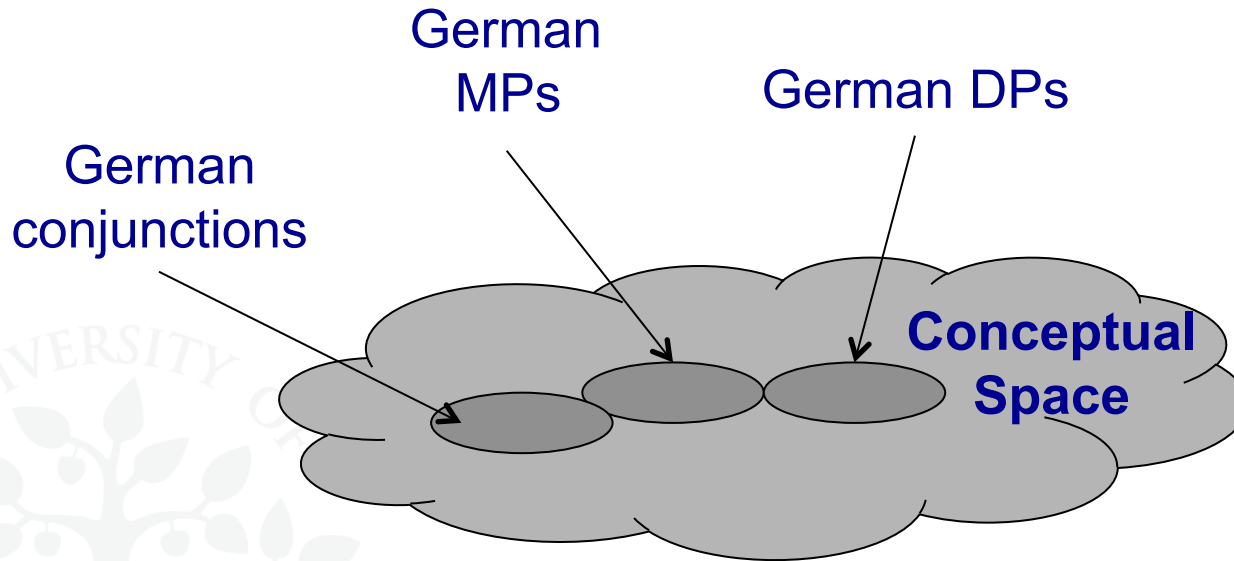


German: Division of labor





German: Division of labor



- paired with relatively distinct syntactic positions:
 - calls for a constructional account!



Construction Grammar

- the structure of a language can be exhaustively described as a set of signs, i.e. form-meaning pairs
- these signs form a structured inventory
- grammar and lexicon form a continuum
- grammar is non-modular and non-derivational
- linguistic knowledge is not innate but grounded in usage and experience
- the semantic/pragmatic knowledge connected to a construction is rich



A Construction Grammar Approach

Proposal:

- Conjunctions, DPs and MPs occur in structural positions that carry meanings (and thus are *constructions*)
- meanings stem from a restricted set of communicative tasks (*interactional frame*, cf. Fillmore 1975, 1982, Fillmore & Atkins 1992)



Items in similar structural positions

<PS5MU>: You know at the top it was like sloping down here and the car's like this and I'm having to try and get the car back down without it toppling over and it was an abs

<PS5N0>: Where were you?

<PS5MU>: I was on the erm [...] bypass at this point [clears throat] about erm ... less than an hour from home

<PS5N0>: **Yes** but that's when your concentration flags.





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- topic continuity
- contact, perception, understanding
- acceptance of contribution
- interpersonal function



Items in similar structural positions

<PS0K9>: er I want to [..] want to buy er er [cough] another German one and then the poxy er spare part [..]

<PS0JX>: Yeah but they're er so well made you sh shouldn't really need to have to change it very often.

<PS0JL>: But he's not bad at spraying. He's a good sprayer.

<PS0JJ>: Oh but that's the whole reason he stopped because he couldn't

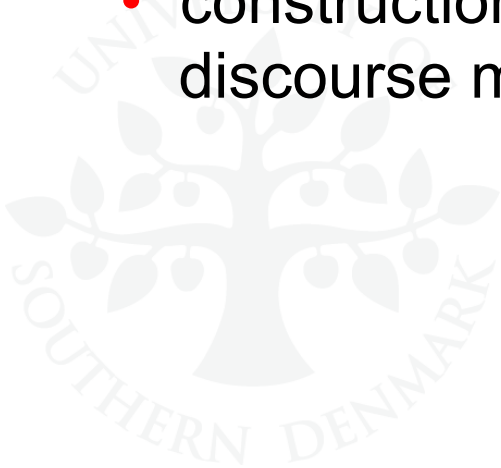
<PS1EP>: And I bought a house [..]

<PS1EM>: Ah but you've got a British passport.



Similar structural positions

- items are similar because of their similar structural positions
- interpretation depends on structural position
- construction: imposes certain interpretations on a discourse marker





Uptaking construction

form:

A: turn (TRP) B: DM but-clause

meaning(s):

- topic continuity
- successful contact, perception, understanding
- acceptance of contribution
- solidary interpersonal function
- account of self-selection (turn-taking)



***but*-clauses without uptaking DP**

<PS000>: I didn't ever relish the thought of becoming a sort of geriatric performer, going around clubs and summer seasons. Er I'd always wanted to act even as a kid of fifteen sixteen er and I got into singing before I went into acting and so acting s see that seemed to be a good period to break my life and start again. [...]

<PS38F>: **But** you must you must have been asked dozens of times to go back into the pop concert field?





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<PS38F>: **But** you must you must have been asked dozens of times to go back into the pop concert field?

➤ polite protest





***but*-clauses without uptaking DP**

<PS5M2>: What time of year do you cut the peats?

<K6NPS001>: **Well** er the best time is the month of May.

<PS5M2>: Aha.

<K6NPS001>: **But** this year you couldn't, the weather was so





***but*-clauses without uptaking DP**

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➤ concession to speaker's own previous utterance





Constructional vs lexical meanings

- the interpretations of DPs stem both from their lexical content and from the structural positions (= constructions) in which they occur

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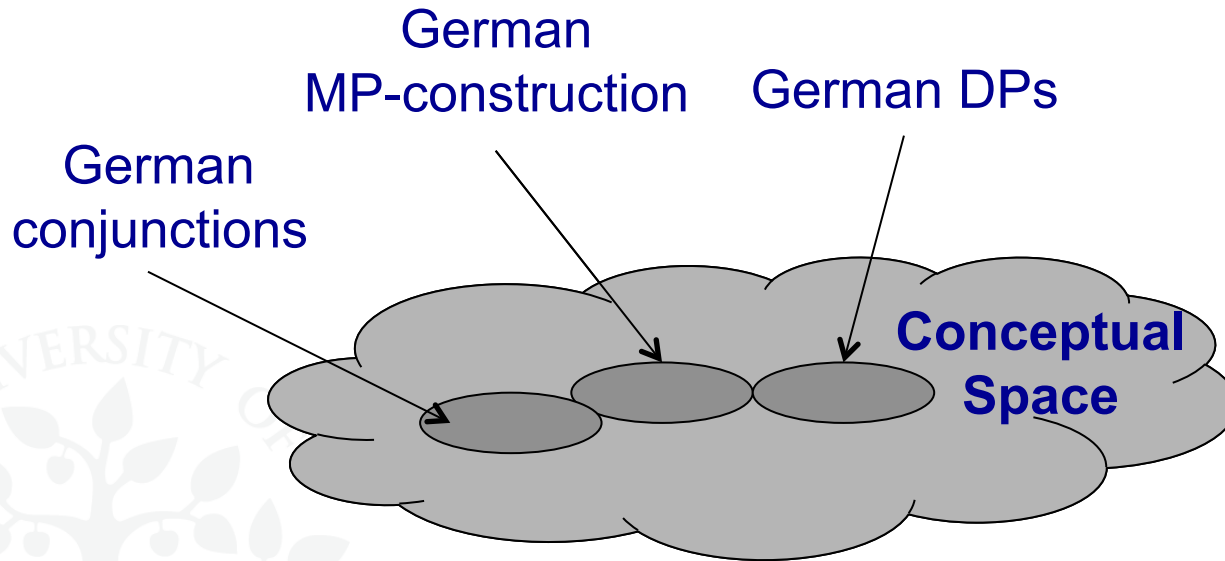
Interim Summary:

- (interactional) interpretation of a discourse particle depends
 - on its structural position
 - on its lexical content
- constructional approach thus accounts for
 - the multifunctionality of each DM
 - the interpretability of DMs in their different sequential positions



Cross-linguistic Comparison

Croft (2001): Radical Construction Grammar





Radical Construction Grammar

Croft (2001):

- constructions are the primitive elements of syntactic analysis
- constructions are language-specific
- categories are construction-specific (e.g. *drink* Verb-TNS vs. *drink* Verb-INS)
- there are therefore no categories independent of particular constructions, let alone cross-linguistic or even universal categories
- language comparison only via conceptual spaces



Conceptual space

- models of discourse, e.g.
 - Schiffrin (1987): discourse planes
 - Diewald/Fischer: domains of communication
 - propositional content – what is talked about
 - discourse management
 - anchoring the current utterance in previous discourse – why this utterance here now
 - Fischer (2000, 2015, forthcoming):
 - communicative tasks participants are faced with
 - 'attended-to' categories
 - cognitive reality
 - interactional frame (Fillmore 1982)



Tasks participants are faced with

- propositional content – what is talked about
 - present relationships between events reported (connective functions)
 - present epistemic stance
- anchoring the current utterance in previous discourse – why this utterance here now
 - relationships between current utterance and common ground
- discourse management
 - present the contents in order for the hearer to understand
 - securing a channel, perception, understanding
 - managing speech (hesitation, reformulation)
 - signaling acceptance
 - highlighting important information
 - managing interpersonal relations



Tasks participants face

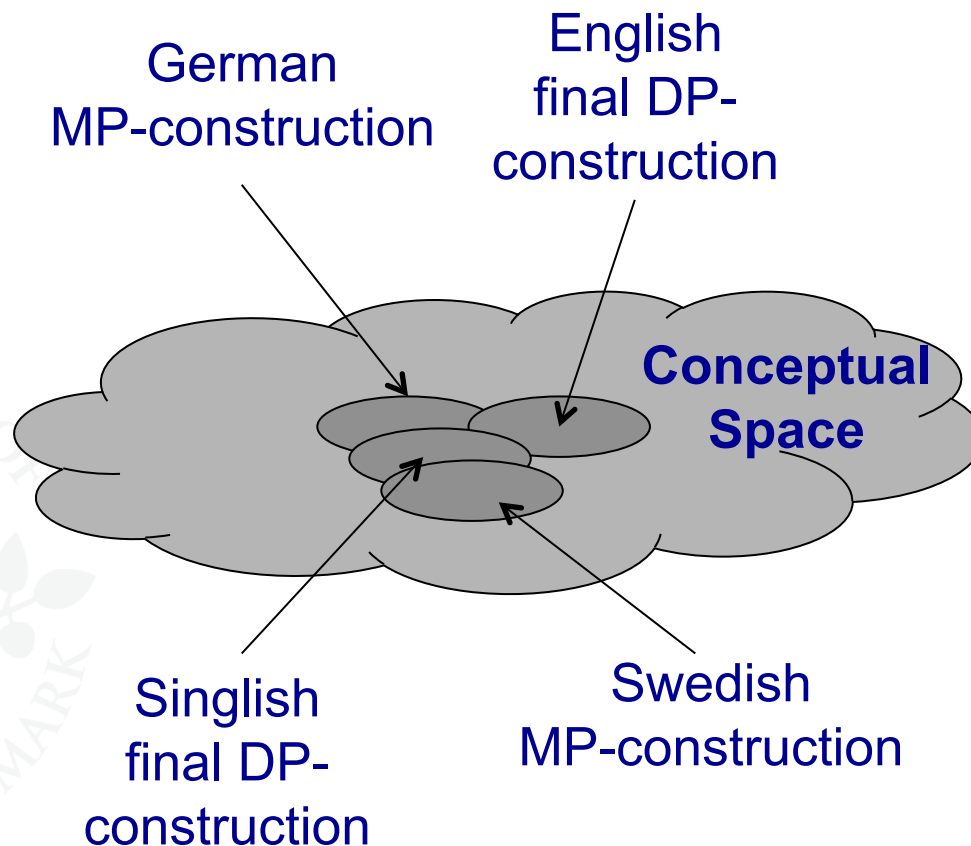
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communicative
background
frame



Cross-linguistic Comparison

Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001): via conceptual space





MP Candidates in English

then (Haselow 2011)

A: oh he's fairly happy (.) uhm (.)

B: why do (-) why do you think he doesn't write then

PGP: the question is open why he does not write.

current situation: I wonder why he doesn't write
-> *why do you think he doesn't write then*



MP Candidates in English

already (Heide 2015)

...can have some indoor options in mind, advises Chapman.
Enough togetherness, *already*! Sure, it's great to take a break
from the busyness of work... (Today's Parent Magazine, Coca)

S.K. KENSLER, San Francisco: Enough is enough with the
election polls *already*! (San Francisco Chronicle News, Coca)

temporal dimension:





MP Candidates in English

already

... Carabinieri officers honked impatiently, with one shouting, 'Move those sheep already!' (NY Times, Coca)

PGP: one may expect: you may move your sheep later.

current situation: you should move your sheep now.

-> *move your sheep already.*

- temporal dimension still identifiable
- comparison with a proposition in the common ground



MP Candidates in English

KEVIN: Man, I just got ta get laid *already*! This blowjob thing is bullshit. (American Pie, Coca)

My comment as to who won the presidential election: Flip a coin, *already*! (Chicago News, Coca)

- here, the violation of expectation concerns the fulfillment of conditions in general

PGP: one may expect: it takes more than flipping a coin.

current situation: it is enough to flip a coin.

-> *flip a coin already.*



already in the Corpora

- the modal particle use of *already* is quite frequent in American English (about 23%)
- it is comparatively rare in British English, but does occur:

‘...to live in the public eye, I mean, I would slit my wrists *already*. I can't understand how this poor girl can take it.’ (BNC_W_newspaper tabloid CH1)

- the modal interpretations occur most often in imperative constructions, yet are not confined to them



Interim Summary:

- English has some DMs that fulfill similar functions as German modal particles
- the function to relate the current utterance to a pragmatically given proposition (common ground) is not an aspect of the meaning of the DM, but of the slot in the final position (at least for the DMs considered), i.e. of the construction
- constructions are language-specific, and so are the ways to express relations to particular domains of discourse, such as common ground

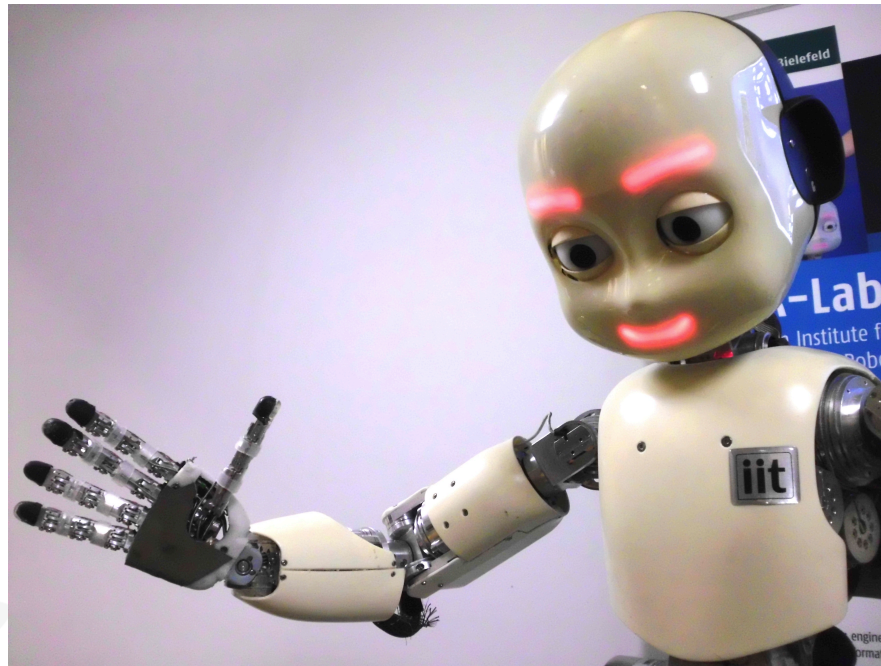


Conclusion: Definition of DMs

- **cross-linguistic definition of DMs can only be functional**
 - a fine-grained model of discourse (like Fillmore's interactional frames) is needed for a systematic account
- **the functions of DMs are encoded in language-specific constructions**
 - which often encode several meanings/functions on several levels at the same time
 - which account for the polyfunctionality of individual DMs



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